THE Hudson REVIEW

WENDELL BERRY:
A Native Hill

WILLIAM EMPSON:
Volpone

MARVIN MUDRICK:
Must We Burn Mme. de Beauvoir?

VICTOR BROMBERT:
Valéry: The Dance of Words

MARIUS BEWLEY:
Modes of Poetry

Poems by RICHARD WILBUR, CHARLES TOMLINSON, SUZANNE GROSS, BENOY MOJUMDAR.

Articles and Reviews by PATRICK CRUTTWELL, VERNON YOUNG, ROBERT GARIS, EDWARD W. SAID, JOHN SIMON, B. H. HAGGIN, BERNARD BERGONZI, CHARLES W. MILLARD, ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS.

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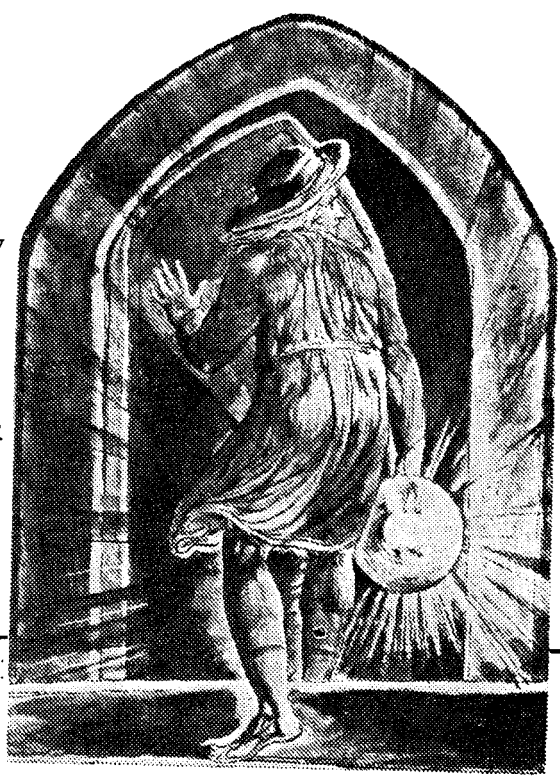

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir:

Mr. Norman Podhoretz informs me in a private communication that he did too include the story about Lauren Bacall and himself in *Making It,* whereas I had referred to that story in "Mailer on the March" (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Autumn 1968) as "not included."

Inasmuch as in the book Mr. Podhoretz has anonymized, glossed over and truncated the story, it seemed simpler and more charitable—especially in what was a review of Mailer rather than Podhoretz, the latter figuring in it only by way of contrast—to refer to the incident as not included. I stand corrected. I should have written: "included in a pusillanimously bowdlerized version."

JOHN SIMON

New York City

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WENDELL BERRY

A Native Hill

Pull down thy vanity, it is not man
Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.
Learn of the green world what can be thy place . . .
—Ezra Pound, *Canto LXXXI*

I

THE HILL IS NOT A HILL IN THE USUAL SENSE. It has no "other side." It is an arm of Kentucky's central upland known as The Bluegrass; one can think of it as a ridge reaching out from that center, progressively cut and divided, made ever narrower by the valleys of the creeks that drain it. The town of Port Royal, in Henry County, stands on one of the last heights of this upland, the valleys of two creeks, Gullion's Branch and Cane Run, opening on either side of it into the valley of the Kentucky River. My house backs against the hill's foot where it descends from the town to the river. The river, whose waters have carved the hill and so descended from it, lies within a hundred steps of my door.

Within about four miles of Port Royal, on the upland and in the bottoms upriver, all my grandparents and great-grandparents lived and left such memories as their descendents have bothered to keep. Little enough has been remembered. The family's life here goes back to my mother's great-great-grandfather and to my father's great-grandfather, but of those earliest ones there are only a few vague word-of-mouth recollections. The only place antecedent to this place that has any immediacy to any of us is the town of Cashel in County Tipperary, Ireland, which one of my great-grandfathers left as a boy to spend the rest of his life in Port Royal. His name was James Mathews, and he was a shoemaker. So well did he fit his life into this place that he is remembered, even in the family, as having belonged here. The family's only real memories of Cashel are my own, coming from a visit I made there five years ago.

And so such history as my family has is the history of its life

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here. All that any of us may know of ourselves is to be known in relation to this place. And since I did most of my growing up here, and have had most of my most meaningful experiences here, the place and the history, for me, have been inseparable, and there is a sense in which my own life is inseparable from the history and the place. It is a complex inheritance, and I have been both enriched and bewildered by it.

*

I began my life as the old times and the last of the old-time people were dying out. The Depression and then World War II delayed the mechanization of the farms here, and one of the first disciplines imposed on me was that of a teamster. Perhaps I first stood in the role of student before my father's father who, halting a team in front of me, would demand to know which mule had the best head, which the best shoulder or rump, which was the lead mule, were they hitched right. And there came a time when I knew, and took a considerable pride in knowing. Having a boy's usual desire to play at what he sees men working at, I learned to harness and hitch and work a team. I felt distinguished by that, and took the same pride in it that other boys my age took in their knowledge of automobiles. I seem to have been born with an aptitude for a way of life that was doomed, although I did not understand that at the time. Free of any intimation of its doom, I delighted in it, and learned all I could about it.

That knowledge, and the men who gave it to me, influenced me deeply. It entered my imagination, and gave its substance and tone to my mind. It fashioned in me possibilities and limits, desires and frustrations, that I have no expectation that I will live to the end of. And it is strange to think how barely in the nick of time it came to me. If I had been born five years later I would have begun in a different world, and would no doubt have become a different man.

Those five years made a critical difference in my life, and it is a historical difference. One of the results is that in my generation I am something of an anachronism. I am less a child of my time than the people of my age who grew up in the cities, or than the people who grew up here in my own place five years after I did.

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In my acceptance of Twentieth Century realities there has had to be a certain deliberateness, whereas most of my contemporaries had them simply by being born to them.

*

I have pondered a great deal over a conversation I took part in a number of years ago in one of the offices of New York University. I had lived away from Kentucky for several years—in California, in Europe, in New York City. And now I had decided to go back and take a teaching job at the University of Kentucky, giving up the position I then held on the New York University faculty. That day I had been summoned by one of the seniors of the university, whose intention, I had already learned, was to persuade me to stay on in New York "for my own good."

The decision to leave had cost me considerable difficulty and doubt and hard thought—for hadn't I achieved what had become one of the almost traditional goals of American writers? I had reached the greatest city in the nation; I had a good job; I was meeting other writers and talking to them and learning from them; I had reason to hope that I might take a still larger part in the literary life of that place. On the other hand, I knew I had not escaped Kentucky, and had never really wanted to. I was still writing about it, and had recognized that I would probably need to write about it for the rest of my life. Kentucky was my fate—not an altogether pleasant fate, though it had much that was pleasing in it, but one that I could not leave behind simply by going to another place, and that I therefore felt more and more obligated to meet directly and to understand. Perhaps even more important, I still had a deep love for the place I had been born in, and liked the idea of going back to be part of it again. And that, too, I felt obligated to try to understand. Why should I love one place so much more than any other? What could be the meaning or the use of such love?

The elder of the faculty began the conversation by alluding to Thomas Wolfe, who once taught at the same institution. "Young man," he said, "don't you know you can't go home again?" And he went on to speak of the advantages, for a young writer, of living in New York among the writers and the editors and the publishers.

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The conversation that followed was a persistence of politeness in the face of impossibility. I knew as well as Wolfe that there is a certain *metaphorical* sense in which you can't go home again —that is, the past is lost to the extent that it cannot be lived in again. I knew perfectly well that I could not return home and be a child, or recover the secure pleasures of childhood. But I knew also that as the sentence was spoken to me it bore a self-dramatizing sentimentality that was absurd. Home—the place, the countryside—was still there, still pretty much as I left it, and there was not a reason in the world I could not go back to it if I wanted to.

As for the literary world, I had ventured some distance into that, and liked it well enough. I knew that because I was a writer the literary world would always have an importance for me and would always attract my interest. But I never doubted that the world was more important to me than the literary world; and the world would always be most fully and clearly present to me in the place I was fated by birth to know better than any other.

And so I had already chosen according to the most intimate and necessary inclinations of my own life. But what keeps me thinking of it is the feeling that it was a confrontation of two radically different minds, and that it was a confrontation with significant historical overtones.

I do not pretend to know all about the other man's mind, but it was clear that he wished to speak to me as a representative of the literary world—the world he assumed that I aspired to above all others. His argument was based on the belief that once one had attained the metropolis, the literary capital, the worth of one's origins was canceled out: there simply could be nothing *worth* going back to. What lay behind one had ceased to be a part of life, and had become "subject matter." And there was the belief, long honored among American intellectuals and artists and writers, that a place such as I came from could be returned to only at the price of intellectual death; cut off from the cultural springs of the metropolis, the American countryside is Circe and Mammon. Finally, there was the assumption that the life of the metropolis is *the* experience, the *modern* experience, and that the life of the rural towns, the farms, the wilderness places is not only irrelevant to our time, but archaic as well because unknown or unconsidered by the people who really matter—that is, the urban intellectuals.

I was to realize during the next few years how false and destruc-

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tive and silly those ideas are. But even then I was aware that life outside the literary world was not without honorable precedent: if there was Wolfe, there was also Faulkner; if there was James, there was also Thoreau. But what I had in my mind that made the greatest difference was the knowledge of the few square miles in Kentucky that were mine by inheritance and by birth and by the intimacy the mind makes with the place it awakens in.

*

I can ask now why it should be so automatically supposed that a man is wrong when he turns to face what he cannot escape, and permits himself to accept what he has desired. And I know that the answer is that in so turning back I turned directly against the current of intellectual fashion, which for so long in America has paralleled the movement of the population from country to city. At times I have found the going difficult. Though at the time of my return I felt that I was acting in faithfulness to my nature and possibilities, and now am certain that I was, there were many months when virtually none of my friends agreed with me. During the first year I was back in Kentucky, though my work apparently gave no evidence of decline, I received letters warning me against the Village Virus and the attitudes of Main Street, counseling me to remain broadminded and intellectually aware, admonishing that I should be on the lookout for signs of decay in my work and in my mind. It was feared that I would grow paunchy and join the Farm Bureau.

It is of interest to me that, at the start, I was not at all immune to this sort of thing. I felt an obligation to listen, and to take these warnings to heart. I kept an eye on myself, as though the promised signs of decay might appear at any moment. Even at the first I never really thought they would, but I continued, as though honor-bound, to expect them even after I had become sure that they wouldn't. Which is to say that, although I had maintained a vital connection with my origins, I had been enough influenced by the cultural fashion that I was compulsively suspicious both of my origins and of myself for being unwilling to divide myself from them.

I have come finally to see a very regrettable irony in what

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happened. At a time when originality is more emphasized in the arts, maybe, than ever before, I undertook something truly original—I returned to my origins—and it was generally thought by my literary friends that I had worked my ruin. As far as I can tell, this was simply because *my* originality, my faith in my own origins, had not been anticipated or allowed for by the *fashion* of originality.

*

What finally freed me from these doubts and suspicions was the insistence in what was happening to me that, far from being bored and diminished and obscured to myself by my life here, I had grown more alive and more conscious than I had ever been.

I had made a significant change in my relation to the place: before, it had been mine by coincidence or accident; now it was mine by choice. My return, which at first had been hesitant and tentative, grew wholehearted and sure. I had come back to stay. I hoped to live here the rest of my life. And once that was settled I began to *see* the place with a new clarity and a new understanding and a new seriousness. Before coming back I had been willing to allow the possibility—which one of my friends insisted on—that I already knew this place as well as I ever would. But now I began to see the real abundance and richness of it. It is, I saw, inexhaustible in its history, in the details of its life, in its possibilities. I walked over it, looking, listening, smelling, touching, alive to it as never before. I listened to the talk of my kinsmen and neighbors as I never had done, alert to their knowledge of the place, and to the qualities and energies of their speech. I began more seriously than ever to learn the names of things—the wild plants and animals, natural processes, local places—and to articulate my observations and memories. My language increased and strengthened, and sent my mind into the place like a live root-system. And so what has become the usual order of things reversed itself with me: my mind became the root of my life rather than its sublimation. I came to see myself as growing out of the earth like the other native animals and plants. I saw my body and my daily motions as brief coherences and articulations of the energy of the place, which would fall back into the earth like leaves in the autumn.

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*

In this awakening there has been a good deal of pain. When I lived in other places I looked on their evils with the curious eye of a traveler; I was not responsible for them; it cost me nothing to be a critic, for I had not been there long, and I did not feel that I would stay. But here, now that I am both native and citizen, there is no immunity to what is wrong. It is impossible to escape the sense that I am involved in history. What I am has been to a considerable extent determined by what my forefathers were, by how they chose to treat this place while they lived in it; the lives of most of them diminished it, and limited its possibilities, and narrowed its future. And every day I am confronted by the question of what inheritance I will leave. What do I have that I am using up? For it has been our history that each generation in this place has been less welcome to it than the last. There has been less here for them. At each arrival there has been less fertility in the soil, and a larger inheritance of destructive precedent and shameful history.

I am forever being crept up on and newly startled by the realization that my people established themselves here by killing or driving out the original possessors, by the awareness that people were once bought and sold here by my people, by the sense of the violence they have done to their own kind and to each other and to the earth, by the evidence of their persistent failure to serve either the place or their own community in it. I am forced, against all my hopes and inclinations, to regard the history of my people here as the progress of the doom of what I value most in the world: the life and health of the earth, the peacefulness of human communities and households.

And so here, in the place I love more than any other and where I have chosen among all other places to live my life, I am more painfully divided within myself than I could be in any other place.

*

I know of no better key to what is adverse in our heritage in this place than the account of "The Battle of the Fire-Brands," quoted in Collins' *History of Kentucky* "from the autobiography of Rev. Jacob Young, a Methodist minister." The "Newcastle"

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referred to is the present day New Castle, the county seat of Henry County. I give the quote in full:

> The costume of the Kentuckians was a hunting shirt, buckskin pantaloons, a leathern belt around their middle, a scabbard, and a big knife fastened to their belt; some of them wore hats and some caps. Their feet were covered with moccasins, made of dressed deer skins. They did not think themselves dressed without their powder-horn and shot pouch, or the gun and tomahawk. They were ready, then, for all alarms. They knew but little. They could clear ground, raise corn, and kill turkeys, deer, bears, and buffalo; and, when it became necessary, they understood the art of fighting the Indians as well as any men in the United States.
>
> Shortly after we had taken up our residence, I was called upon to assist in opening a road from the place where Newcastle now stands, to the mouth of Kentucky river. That country, then, was an unbroken forest; there was nothing but an Indian trail passing the wilderness. I met the company early in the morning, with my axe, three days' provisions, and my knapsack. Here I found a captain, with about 100 men, all prepared to labor; about as jovial a company as I ever saw, all good-natured and civil. This was about the last of November, 1797. The day was cold and clear. The country through which the company passed was delightful; it was not a flat country, but, what the Kentuckians called, rolling ground—was quite well stored with lofty timber, and the undergrowth was very pretty. The beautiful canebrakes gave it a peculiar charm. What rendered it most interesting was the great abundance of wild turkeys, deer, bears, and other wild animals. The company worked hard all day, in quiet, and every man obeyed the captain's orders punctually.
>
> About sundown, the captain, after a short address, told us the night was going to be very cold, and we must make very large fires. We felled the hickory trees in great abundance; made great log-heaps, mixing the dry wood with the green hickory; and, laying down a kind of sleepers under the pile, elevated the heap and caused it to burn rapidly. Every man had a water vessel in his knapsack; we searched for and found a stream of water. By this time, the fires were showing to great advantage; so we warmed our cold victuals, ate our suppers, and spent the evening in hearing the hunter's stories relative to the bloody scenes of the Indian war. We then heard some pretty fine singing, considering the circumstances.
>
> Thus far, well; but a change began to take place. They became very rude, and raised the war-whoop. Their shrill shrieks made me tremble. They chose two captains, divided the men into two companies, and commenced fighting with the fire-brands—the log

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> heaps having burned down. The only law for their government was, that no man should throw a brand without fire on it—so that they might know how to dodge. They fought, for two or three hours, in perfect good nature; till brands became scarce, and they began to violate the law. Some were severely wounded, blood began to flow freely, and they were in a fair way of commencing a fight in earnest. At this moment, the loud voice of the captain rang out above the din, ordering every man to retire to rest. They dropped their weapons of warfare, rekindled the fires, and laid down to sleep. We finished our road according to directions, and returned home in health and peace.

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The significance of this bit of history is in its utter violence. The work of clearing the road was itself violent. And from the orderly violence of that labor, these men turned for amusement to disorderly violence. They were men whose element was violence; the only alternatives they were aware of were those within the comprehension of main strength. And let us acknowledge that these were the truly influential men in the history of Kentucky, as well as in the history of most of the rest of America. In comparison to the fatherhood of such as these, the so-called "founding fathers" who established our political ideals are but distant cousins. It is not John Adams or Thomas Jefferson whom we see night after night in the magic mirror of the television set; we see these builders of the road from New Castle to the mouth of the Kentucky River. Their reckless violence has glamorized all our trivialities and evils. Their aggressions have simplified our complexities and problems. They have cut all our Gordian knots. They have appeared in all our disguises and costumes. They have worn all our uniforms. Their war-whoop has sanctified our inhumanity and ratified our blunders of policy.

To testify to the persistence of their influence, it is only necessary for me to confess that I read Rev. Young's account of them with delight; I yield a considerable admiration to the exuberance and extravagance of their fight with the fire-brands; I take a certain pride in belonging to the same history and the same place that they belong to—though I know that they represent the worst that is in us, and in me, and that their presence in our history has been ruinous, and that their survival among us promises ruin.

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"They knew but little," the observant Reverend says of them, and this is the most suggestive thing he says. It is surely understandable and pardonable, under the circumstances, that these men were ignorant by the standards of formal schooling. But one immediately reflects that the American Indian, who was ignorant by the same standards, nevertheless knew how to live in the country without making violence the invariable mode of his relation to it; in fact, from the ecologist's or the conservationist's point of view, he did it *no* violence. This is because he had, in place of what we would call education, a fully integrated culture, the content of which was a highly complex sense of his dependence on the earth. The same, I believe, was generally true of the peasants of certain old agricultural societies, particularly in the Orient. They belonged, by an intricate awareness, to the earth they lived on and by, which meant that they respected it, which meant that they practiced strict economies in the use of it.

The abilities of those Kentucky road builders of 1797 were far more primitive and rudimentary than those of the stone-age people they had driven out. They could clear the ground, grow corn, kill game, and make war. In the minds and hands of men who "know but little"—or little else—all of these abilities are certain to be destructive, even of those values and benefits their use may be intended to serve.

On such a night as Rev. Young describes, an Indian would have made do with a small shelter and a small fire. But these road builders, veterans of the Indian war, "felled the hickory trees in great abundance; made great log-heaps . . . and caused [them] to burn rapidly." Far from making a small shelter that could be adequately heated by a small fire, their way was to make no shelter at all, and heat instead a sizeable area of the landscape. The idea was that when faced with abundance one should consume abundantly—an idea which has survived to become the basis of our present economy. It is neither natural nor civilized, and even from a "practical" point of view it is to the last degree brutalizing and stupid.

I think that the comparison of these road builders with the Indians, on the one hand, and with Old World peasants on the other, is a most suggestive one. The Indians and the peasants were people who belonged deeply and intricately to their places. Their

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ways of life had evolved slowly in accordance with their knowledge of their land, of its needs, of their own relation of dependence and responsibility to it. The road builders, on the contrary, were *placeless* people. That is why "They knew but little." Having left Europe far behind, they had not yet in any meaningful sense arrived in America, not yet having *devoted* themselves to any part of it in a way that would produce the intricate knowledge of it necessary to live in it without destroying it. Because they belonged to no place, it was almost inevitable that they should behave violently toward the places they came to. We *still* have not, in any meaningful way, arrived in America. And in spite of our great reservoir of facts and methods, in comparison to the deep earthly wisdom of established peoples we still know but little.

But my understanding of this curiously parabolic fragment of history will not be complete until I have considered more directly that the occasion of this particular violence was the building of a road. It is obvious that one who values the idea of community cannot speak against roads without risking all sorts of absurdity. It must be noticed, nevertheless, that the predecessor to this first road was "nothing but an Indian trail passing the wilderness"—a path. The Indians, then, who had the wisdom and the grace to live in this country for perhaps ten thousand years without destroying or damaging any of it, needed for their travels no more than a footpath; but their successors who in a century and a half plundered the area of at least half its topsoil and virtually all of its forest, felt immediately that they had to have a road. And my interest here is not in the question of whether or not they *needed* the road, but in the fact that the road was then, and is now, the most characteristic form of their relation to the country.

The difference between a path and a road is not only the obvious one. A path is little more than a habit that comes with knowledge of a place. It is a sort of ritual of familiarity. As a form, it is a form of contact with the known landscape. It is not destructive. It is the perfect adaptation, through experience and familiarity, of movement to place; it obeys the natural contours; such obstacles as it meets it goes around. A road, on the other hand, even the most primitive road, embodies a resistance against the landscape. Its reason is not simply the necessity for movement,

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but haste. Its wish is to *avoid* contact with the landscape; it seeks, so far as possible, to go over the country, rather than through it; its aspiration, as we see clearly in the example of our modern freeways, is to be a bridge; its tendency is to translate place into space in order to traverse it with the least effort. It is destructive, seeking to remove or destroy all obstacles in its way. The primitive road advanced by the destruction of the forest; modern roads advance by the destruction of topography.

That first road from the site of New Castle to the mouth of the Kentucky River—lost now either by obsolescence or metamorphosis—is now being crossed and to some extent replaced by its modern descendent known as I-71. And I have no wish to disturb the question of whether or not *this* road was needed. I only want to observe that it bears no relation whatever to the country it passes through. It is a pure abstraction, built to serve the two abstractions that are the poles of our national life: commerce and expensive pleasure. It was built not according to the lay of the land, but according to a blueprint. Such homes and farmlands and woodlands as happened to be in its way are now buried under it. A part of a hill near here that would have caused it to turn aside was simply cut down and disposed of as thoughtlessly as the pioneer road builders would have disposed of a tree. Its form is the form of speed, dissatisfaction and anxiety. It represents the ultimate in engineering sophistication, but the crudest possible valuation of life in this world. It is as adequate a symbol of our relation to our country now as that first road was of our relation to it in 1797.

*

But the sense of the past also gives a deep richness and resonance to nearly everything I see here. It is partly the sense that what I now see other men that I have known once saw, and partly that this knowledge provides an imaginative access to what I do not know. I think of the country as a kind of palimpsest scrawled over with the comings and goings of people, the erasure of time already in process even as the marks of passage are put down. There are the ritual marks of neighborhood—roads, paths between houses. There are the domestic paths from house to barns and outbuildings and gardens, farm roads threading the pasture gates. There

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are the wanderings of hunters and searchers after lost stock, and the speculative or meditative or inquisitive "walking around" of farmers on wet days and Sundays. There are the spiraling geometry of the rounds of implements in fields, and the passing and returning scratches of plows across croplands. Often these have filled an interval, an opening, between the retreat of the forest from the virgin ground and the forest's return to ground that has been worn out and given up. In the woods here one often finds cairns of stones picked up out of furrows, gulleys left by bad farming, forgotten roads, stone chimneys of houses long rotted away or burned.

*

Occasionally one stumbles into a coincidence which, like an unexpected alignment of windows, momentarily cancels out the sense of historical whereabouts, giving with an overwhelming immediacy an awareness of the reality of the past.

The possibility of this awareness is always immanent in old homesites. It may suddenly bear in upon one at the sight of old orchard trees standing in the dooryard of a house now filled with baled hay. It came to me when I looked out the attic window of a disintegrating log house and saw a far view of the cleared ridges with wooded hollows in between, and nothing in sight to reveal the date. Who was I, leaning to the window? When?

It broke upon me one afternoon when, walking in the woods on one of my family places, I came upon a gap in a fence, wired shut, but with deep-cut wagon tracks still passing through it under the weed growth and the fallen leaves. Where that thicket stands there was crop ground maybe as late as my own time. I knew some of the men who tended it; their names and faces were instantly alive in my mind. I knew how it had been with them—how they would harness their mule teams in the early mornings in my grandfather's big barn and come to the woods-rimmed tobacco patches, the mules' feet wet with the dew. And in the solitude and silence that came upon them they would set to work, their water jugs set down in the shade of bushes in the fence rows.

As a child I learned the early mornings in these places for myself, riding out in the wagons with the tobacco-cutting crews to

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those steep fields in the dew-wet shadow of the woods. As the day went on the shadows would draw back under the feet of the trees, and it would get hot. Little whirlwinds would cross the opening, picking up the dust and the dry "groundleaves" of the tobacco. We made a game of running with my grandfather to stand, shoulders scrunched and eyes squinched, in their middles.

Having such memories, I can acknowledge only with reluctance and sorrow that those slopes should never have been broken. Rich as they were, they were too steep. The humus stood dark and heavy over them once; the plow was its doom.

II

I start down from one of the heights of the upland, the town of Port Royal at my back. It is a winter day, overcast and still, and the town is closed in itself, humming and muttering a little, like a winter beehive.

The dog runs ahead, prancing and looking back, knowing the way we are about to go. This is a walk well established with us—a route in our minds as well as on the ground. There is a sort of mystery in the establishment of these ways. Any time one crosses a given stretch of country with some frequency, no matter how wanderingly one begins, the tendency is always toward habit. By the third or fourth trip, without realizing it, one is following a fixed path, going the way one went before. After that, one may still wander, but only by deliberation, and when there is reason to hurry, or when the mind wanders rather than the feet, one returns to the old route. Familiarity has begun. One has made a relationship with the landscape, and the form and the symbol and the enactment of the relationship is the path. These paths of mine are seldom worn on the ground. They are habits of mind, directions and turns. They are as personal as old shoes. My feet are comfortable in them.

From the height I can see far out over the country, the long open ridges of the farmland, the wooded notches of the streams, the valley of the river opening beyond, and then more ridges and hollows of the same kind.

Underlying this country, nine hundred feet below the highest

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ridgetops, more than four hundred feet below the surface of the river, is sea level. We seldom think of it here; we are a long way from the coast and the sea is alien to us. And yet the attraction of sea level dwells in this country as an ideal dwells in a man's mind. All our rains go in search of it and, departing, they have carved the land in a shape that is fluent and falling. The streams branch like vines, and between the branches the land rises steeply and then rounds and gentles into the long narrowing fingers of ridgeland. Near the heads of the streams even the steepest land was not too long ago farmed and kept cleared. But now it has been given up and the woods is returning. The wild is flowing back like a tide. The arable ridgetops reach out above the gathered trees like headlands into the sea, bearing their human burdens of fences and houses and barns, crops and roads.

Looking out over the country, one gets a sense of the whole of it: the ridges and hollows, the clustered buildings of the farms, the open fields, the woods, the stock ponds set like coins into the slopes. But this is a surface sense, an exterior sense, such as you get from looking down on the roof of a house. The height is a threshold from which to step down into the wooded folds of the land, the interior, under the trees and along the branching streams.

I pass through a pasture gate on a deep-worn path that grows shallow a little way beyond, and then disappears altogether into the grass. The gate has gathered thousands of passings to and fro, that have divided like the slats of a fan on either side of it. It is like a fist holding together the strands of a net.

Beyond the gate the land leans always more steeply toward the branch. I follow it down, and then bear left along the crease at the bottom of the slope. I have entered the downflow of the land. The way I am going is the way the water goes. There is something comfortable and fit-feeling in this, something free in this yielding to gravity and taking the shortest way down. The mind moves through the watershed as the water moves.

As the hollow deepens into the hill, before it has yet entered the woods, the grassy crease becomes a raw gulley, and along the steepening slopes on either side I can see the old scars of erosion, places where the earth is gone clear to the rock. My people's errors have become the features of my country.

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It occurs to me that it is no longer possible to imagine how this country looked in the beginning, before the white people drove their plows into it. It is not possible to know what was the shape of the land here in this hollow when it was first cleared. Too much of it is gone, loosened by the plows and washed away by the rain. I am walking the route of the departure of the virgin soil of the hill. I am not looking at the same land the first-comers saw. The original surface of the hill is as extinct as the passenger pigeon. The pristine America that the first white men saw is a lost continent, sunk like Atlantis in the sea. The thought of what was here once and is gone forever will not leave me as long as I live. It is as though I walk knee-deep in its absence.

The slopes along the hollow steepen still more and I go in under the trees. I pass beneath the surface. I am enclosed, and my sense, my interior sense, of the country becomes intricate. There is no longer the possibility of seeing very far. The distances are closed off by the trees and the steepening walls of the hollow. One cannot grow familiar here by sitting and looking as one can up in the open on the ridge. Here the eyes become dependent on the feet. To see the woods from the inside one must look and move and look again. It is inexhaustible in its standpoints. A lifetime will not be enough to experience it all.

Not far from the beginning of the woods, and set deep in the earth in the bottom of the hollow, is a rock-walled pool not a lot bigger than a bathtub. The wall is still nearly as straight and tight as when it was built. It makes a neatly turned narrow horseshoe, the open end downstream. This is a historical ruin, dug here either to catch and hold the water of the little branch, or to collect the water of a spring whose vein broke to the surface here —it is probably no longer possible to know which. The pool is filled with earth now, and grass grows in it. And the branch bends around it, cut down to the bare rock, a torrent after heavy rain, other times bone dry. All that is certain is that when the pool was dug and walled there was deep topsoil on the hill to gather and hold the water. And this high up, at least, the bottom of the hollow, instead of the present raw notch of the streambed, wore the same mantle of soil as the slopes, and the stream was a steady seep or trickle, running most or all of the year. This tiny pool no doubt once furnished water for a considerable number of stock

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through the hot summers. And now it is only a lost souvenir, archaic and useless, except for the bitter intelligence there is in it. It is one of the monuments to what is lost.

Like the pasture gates, the streams are great collectors of comings and goings. The streams go down, and paths always go down beside the streams. For a while I walk along an old wagon road that is buried in leaves—a fragment, beginningless and endless as the middle of a sentence on some scrap of papyrus. There is a cedar whose branches reach over this road, and under the branches I find the leavings of two kills of some bird of prey. The most recent is a pile of blue jay feathers. The other has been rained on and is not identifiable. How little we know. How little of this was intended or expected by any man. The road that has become the grave of men's passages has led to the life of the woods.

> And I say to myself: Here is your road
> without beginning or end, appearing
> out of the earth and ending in it, bearing
> no load but the hawk's kill, and the leaves
> building earth on it, something more
> to be borne. Tracks fill with earth
> and return to absence. The road was worn
> by men bearing earth along it. They have come
> to endlessness. In their passing
> they could not stay in, trees have risen
> And stand still. It is leading to the dark,
> to mornings where you are not. Here
> is your road, beginningless and endless as God.

Now I have come down within the sound of the water. The winter has been rainy, and the hill is full of dark seeps and trickles, gathering finally, along these creases, into flowing streams. The sound of them is one of the elements, and defines a zone. When their voices return to the hill after their absence during summer and autumn, it is a better place to be. A thirst in the mind is quenched.

I have already passed the place where water began to flow in the little stream bed I am following. It broke into the light from beneath a rock ledge, a thin glittering stream. It lies beside me as I walk, overtaking me and going by, yet not moving, a thread of

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light and sound. And now from below comes the steady tumble and rush of the water of Camp Branch—whose nameless camp was it named for?—and gradually as I descend the sound of the smaller stream is lost in the sound of the larger.

The two hollows join, the line of the meeting of the two spaces obscured even in winter by the trees. But the two streams meet precisely as two roads. That is, the stream *beds* do; the one ends in the other. As for the meeting of the waters, there is no looking at that. The one flow does not end in the other, but continues in it, one with it, two clarities merged without a shadow.

All waters are one. This is a reach of the sea, flung like a net over the hill, and now drawn back to the sea. And as the sea is never raised in the earthly nets of fishermen, so the hill is never caught and pulled down by the watery net of the sea. But always a little of it is. Each of the gathering strands of the net carries back some of the hill melted in it. Sometimes, as now, it carries so little that the water seems to flow clear; sometimes it carries a lot and is brown and heavy with it. Whenever greedy or thoughtless men have lived on it, the hill has literally flowed out of their tracks into the bottom of the sea.

There appears to be a law that when creatures have reached the level of consciousness, as men have, they must become conscious of the creation; they must learn how they fit into it and what its needs are and what it requires of them, or else pay a terrible penalty: the spirit of the creation will go out of them, and they will become destructive. The very earth will depart from them and go where they cannot follow.

My mind is never empty or idle at the joinings of streams. Here is the work of the world going on. The creation is felt, alive and intent on its materials, in such places. In the angle of the meeting of the two streams stands the steep wooded point of the ridge, like the prow of an upturned boat—finished, as it was a thousand years ago, as it will be in a thousand years. Its becoming is only incidental to its being. It will be because it is. It has no aim or end except to be. By being it is growing and wearing into what it will be. The fork of the stream lies at the foot of the slope like hammer and chisel laid down at the foot of a finished sculpture. But the stream is no dead tool; it is alive, it is still at its work. Put your hand to it to learn the health of this part of the world. It is the wrist of the hill.

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Perhaps it is to prepare to hear some day the music of the spheres that I am always turning my ears to the music of streams. There is indeed a music in streams, but it is not for the hurried. It has to be loitered by and imagined. Or imagined *toward,* for it is hardly for men at all. Nature has a patient ear. To her the slowest funeral march sounds like a jig. She is satisfied to have the notes drawn out to the lengths of days or weeks or months. Small variations are acceptable to her, modulations as leisurely as the opening of a flower.

The stream is full of stops and gates. Here it has piled up rocks in its path, and pours over them into a tiny pool it has scooped at the foot of its fall. Here it has been dammed by a mat of leaves caught behind a fallen limb. Here it must force a narrow passage, here a wider one. Tomorrow the flow may increase or slacken, and the tone will shift. In an hour or a week that rock may give way, and the composition will advance by another note. Some idea of it may be got by walking slowly along and noting the changes as one passes from one little fall or rapid to another. But this is a highly simplified and diluted version of the real thing, which is too complex and widespread over to be actually heard by us. The ear must imagine an impossible patience in order to grasp even the unimaginableness of such music.

But the creation is musical, and this is a part of its music, as birdsong is, or the words of poets. The music of the streams is the music of the shaping of the earth, by which the rocks are pushed and shifted downward toward the level of the sea.

And now I find lying in the path an empty beer can. This is the track of the ubiquitous man Friday of all our woods. In my walks I never fail to discover some sign that he has preceded me. I find his empty shotgun shells, his empty can and bottles, his sandwich wrappings. In wooded places along roadsides one is apt to find, as well, his over-travelled bedsprings, his outcast refrigerator, and heaps of the imperishable refuse of his modern kitchen. A year ago, almost in this same place where I have found his beer can, I found a possum that he had shot dead and left lying, in celebration of his manhood. He is the true American pioneer, perfectly at rest in his assumption that he is the first and the last whose inheritance and fate this place will ever be. Going forth, as he may think, to sow, he only broadcasts his effects.

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As I go on down the path alongside Camp Branch, I walk by the edge of croplands abandoned only within my own lifetime. On my left are the south slopes where the woods are old, long undisturbed. On my right, the more fertile north slopes are covered with patches of briars and sumacs and a lot of young walnut trees. Tobacco of an extraordinary quality was once grown here, and then the soil wore thin, and these places were given up for the more accessible ridges that were not so steep, where row-cropping made better sense anyway. But now, under the thicket growth, a mat of bluegrass has grown to testify to the good nature of this ground. It was fine dirt that lay here once, and I am far from being able to say that I could have resisted the temptation to plow it. My understanding of what is best for it is the tragic understanding of hindsight, the awareness that I have been taught what was here to be lost by the loss of it.

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the danger of this by making our personal pride and greed the standard of our behavior toward the world—to the incalculable disadvantage of the world and every living thing in it. And now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear. It is not only our own creativity—our own capacity for life—that is stifled by our arrogant assumption; the creation itself is stifled.

We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to *know* the world and to learn what is good for it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

Standing in the presence of these worn and abandoned fields, where the creation has begun its healing without the hindrance or

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the help of man, with the voice of the stream in the air and the woods standing in silence on all the slopes around me, I am deep in the interior not only of my place in the world, but of my own life, its sources and searches and concerns. I first came into these places following the men to work when I was a child. I knew the men who took their lives from such fields as these, and their lives to a considerable extent made my life what it is. In what came to me from them there was both wealth and poverty, and I have been a long time discovering which was which.

It was in the woods here along Camp Branch that Bill White, my grandfather's Negro hired hand, taught me to hunt squirrels. Bill lived in a little tin-roofed house on up nearer the head of the hollow. And this was, I suppose more than any other place, his hunting ground. It was the place of his freedom, where he could move without subservience, without considering who he was or who anybody else was. On late summer mornings, when it was too wet to work, I would follow him into the woods. As soon as we stepped in under the trees he would become silent, and absolutely attentive to the life of the place. He was a good teacher and an exacting one. The rule seemed to be that if I wanted to stay with him, I had to make it possible for him to forget I was there. I was to make no noise. If I did he would look back and make a downward emphatic gesture with his hand, as explicit as writing: Be quiet, or go home. He would see a squirrel crouched in a fork or lying along the top of a branch, and indicate with a grin and a small jerk of his head where I should look; and then wait, while I, conscious of being watched and demanded upon, searched it out for myself. He taught me to look and to listen and to be quiet. I wonder if he knew the value of such teaching or the rarity of such a teacher.

In the years that followed I hunted often here alone. And later in these same woods I experienced my first obscure dissatisfactions with hunting. Though I could not have put it into words then, the sense had come to me that hunting as I knew it—the eagerness to kill something I did not need to eat—was an artificial relation to the place, when what I was beginning to need, just as inarticulately then, was a relation that would be deeply natural and meaningful. That was a time of great uneasiness and restlessness for me. It would be the fall of the year, the leaves would be turning, and

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ahead of me would be another year of school. There would be confusions about girls and ambitions, the wordless hurried feeling that time and events and my own nature were pushing me toward what I was going to be—and I had no notion what it was, or how to prepare.

And then there were years when I did not come here at all—when these places and their history were in my mind, and part of me, in places thousands of miles away. And now I am here again, changed from what I was, and still changing. The future is no more certain to me now than it ever was, though its risks are clearer, and so are my own desires; I am the father of two young children whose lives are hostages given to the future. Because of them and because of events in the world, life seems more fearful and difficult to me now than ever before; but it is also more inviting, and I am constantly aware of its nearness to joy. Much of the interest and excitement that I have in my life now has come from the deepening, in the years since my return here, of my relation to this countryside that is my native place. For in spite of all that has happened to me in other places, the great change and the great possibility of change in my life has been in my sense of this place. The major difference is perhaps only that I have grown able to be wholeheartedly present here. I am able to sit and be quiet at the foot of some tree here in this woods along Camp Branch, and feel a deep peace, both in the place and in my awareness of it, that not too long ago I was not conscious of the possibility of. This peace is partly in being free of the suspicion that pursued me for most of my life, no matter where I was, that there was perhaps another place I *should* be, or would be happier or better in; it is partly in the increasingly articulate consciousness of being here, and of the significance and importance of being here.

After more than thirty years I have at last arrived at the candor necessary to stand on this part of the earth that is so full of my own history and so much damaged by it, and ask: What *is* this place? What is in it? What is its nature? How should men live in it? What must I do?

I have not found the answers, though I believe that in partial and fragmentary ways they have begun to come to me. But the questions are more important than their answers. In the final sense they *have* no answers. They are like the questions—they are

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perhaps the same questions—that were the discipline of Job. They are a part of the necessary enactment of humility, teaching a man what his importance is, what his responsibility is, and what his place is, both on the earth and in the order of things. And though the answers must always come obscurely and in fragments, the questions must be persistently asked. They are fertile questions. In their implications and effects, they are moral and esthetic and, in the best and fullest sense, practical. They promise a relationship to the world that is decent and preserving.

They are also, both in origin and effect, religious. I am uneasy with the term, for such religion as has been openly practiced in this part of the world has promoted and fed upon a destructive schism between body and soul, heaven and earth. It has encouraged people to believe that the world is of no importance, and that their only obligation in it is to submit to certain churchly formulas in order to get to heaven. And so the people who might have been expected to care most selflessly for the world have had their minds turned elsewhere—to a pursuit of "salvation" that was really only another form of gluttony and self-love, the desire to perpetuate their own small lives beyond the life of the world. The heaven-bent have abused the earth thoughtlessly, by inattention, and their negligence has permitted and encouraged others to abuse it deliberately. Once the creator was removed from the creation, divinity became only a remote abstraction, a social weapon in the hands of the religious institutions. This split in public values produced or was accompanied by, as it was bound to be, an equally artificial and ugly division in people's lives, so that a man, while pursuing heaven with the sublime appetite he thought of as his soul, could turn his heart against his neighbors and his hands against the world. For these reasons, though I know that my questions *are* religious, I dislike having to *say* that they are.

But when I ask them my aim is not primarily to get to heaven. Though heaven is certainly more important than the earth if all they say about it is true, it is still morally incidental to it and dependent on it, and I can only imagine it and desire it in terms of what I know of the earth. And so my questions do not aspire beyond the earth. They aspire *toward* it and *into* it. Perhaps they aspire *through* it. They are religious because they are asked at the limit of what I know; they acknowledge mystery and honor its

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presence in the creation; they are spoken in reverence for the order and grace that I see, and that I trust beyond my power to see.

The stream has led me down to an old barn built deep in the hollow to house the tobacco once grown on those abandoned fields. Now it is surrounded by the trees that have come back on every side—a relic, a fragment of another time, strayed out of its meaning. This is the last of my historical landmarks. To here, my walk has had insistent overtones of memory and history. It has been a movement of consciousness through knowledge, eroding and shaping, adding and wearing away. I have descended like the water of the stream through what I know of myself, and now that I have there is a little more to know. But here at the barn, the old roads and the cow paths—the formal connections with civilization—come to an end.

I stoop between the strands of a barbed wire fence, and in that movement I go out of time into timelessness. I come into a wild place. I walk along the foot of a slope that was once cut bare of trees, like all the slopes of this part of the country—but long ago; and now the woods is established again, the ground healed, the trees grown big, their trunks rising clean, free of undergrowth. The place has a serenity and dignity that one feels immediately; the creation is whole in it and unobstructed. It is free of the strivings and dissatisfactions, the partialities and imperfections of places under the mechanical dominance of men. Here, what to a housekeeper's eye might seem disorderly is nonetheless orderly and within order; what might seem arbitrary or accidental is included in the design of the whole as if by intention; what might seem evil or violent is a comfortable member of the household. Where the creation is whole nothing is extraneous. The presence of the creation here makes this a holy place, and it is as a pilgrim that I have come—to give the homage of awe and love, to submit to mystification. It is the creation that has attracted me, its perfect interfusion of life and design. I have made myself its follower and its apprentice.

One early morning last spring, I came and found the woods floor strewn with bluebells. In the cool sunlight and the lacy shadows of the spring woods the blueness of those flowers, their elegant shape, their delicate fresh scent kept me standing and looking. I found a rich delight in them that I cannot describe and

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that I will never forget. Though I had been familiar for years with most of the spring woods flowers, I had never seen these and had not known they grew here. Looking at them, I felt a strange feeling of loss and sorrow that I had never seen them before. But I was also exultant that I saw them now—that they were here.

For me, in the thought of them will always be the sense of the joyful surprise with which I found them—the sense that came suddenly to me then that the world is blessed beyond my understanding, more abundantly than I will ever know. What lives are still ahead of me here to be discovered and exulted in, tomorrow, or in twenty years? What wonder will be found here on the morning after my death? Though as a man I inherit great evils and the possibility of great loss and suffering, I know that my life is blessed and graced by the yearly flowering of the bluebells. How perfect they are! In their presence I am humble and joyful. If I were given all the learning and all the methods of my race I could not make one of them, or even imagine one. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. It is the privilege and the labor of the apprentice of creation to come with his imagination into the unimaginable, and with his speech into the unspeakable.

III

On weekends the Air Force reservists practice war. Their jet fighters come suddenly over the crest of the hill into the opening of the valley, very low, screeching insistently into our minds—perfecting deadliness. We can see the rockets nestling under their wings. They do not represent anything I understand as my own or that I identify with. Unable to imagine myself flying one or employing one for any of my purposes, I am left with the alternative of imagining myself their target. They strike fear into me. I fear them, I think, with the same fear—though not, certainly, with the same intensity—with which they are feared in the villages and the rice paddies of Vietnam. I am afraid that nothing I value can withstand them. I am unable to believe that what I most hope for can be served by them.

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On weekends, too, the hunters come out from the cities to kill for pleasure such game as has been able to survive the constraints and destructions of the human economy, the highway traffic, the poison sprays. They come weighted down with expensive clothes and equipment, all purchased for the sake of a few small deaths in a country they neither know nor care about. We hear their guns, and see their cars parked at lane ends and on the roadsides.

*

Sometimes I can no longer think in the house or in the garden or in the cleared fields. They bear too much resemblance to our failed human history—failed because it has led to this human present that is such a bitterness and a trial. And so I go to the woods. As I enter in under the trees, dependably, almost at once, and by nothing I do, things fall into place. I enter an order that does not exist outside, in the human spaces. I feel my life take its place among the lives—the trees, the annual plants, the animals and birds, the living of all these and the dead—that go and have gone to make the life of the earth. I am less important than I thought, the human race is less important than I thought. I rejoice in that. My mind loses its urgings, senses its nature, and is free. *The forest grew here in its own time, and so I will live, suffer and* rejoice, and die in my own time. There is nothing that I may decently hope for that I cannot reach by patience as well as by anxiety. The hill, that is a part of America, has killed no one in the service of the American government. Then why should I, who am a fragment of the hill? I wish to be as peaceable as my land, which does no violence, though it has been the scene of violence and has had violence done to it.

How, having a consciousness, an intelligence, a human spirit—all the vaunted equipment of my race—can I humble myself before a mere piece of the earth and speak of myself as its fragment? Because my mind transcends the hill only to be filled with it, to comprehend it a little, to know that it lives on the hill in time as well as in place, to recognize itself as the hill's fragment.

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The false and truly belittling transcendence is ownership. The hill has had more owners than its owners have had years—they are grist for its mill. It has had few friends. But I wish to be its friend, for I think it serves its friends well. It tells them they are fragments of its life. In its life they transcend their years.

*

To walk in the woods, mindful only of the *physical* extent of it, is to go perhaps as owner, or as knower, confident of one's own history and of one's own importance. But to go there, mindful as well of its temporal extent, of the age of it, and of all that led up to the present life of it, and of all that will probably follow it, is to feel oneself a flea in the pelt of a great living thing, the discrepancy between its life and one's own so great that it cannot be imagined. One has come into the presence of mystery. After all the trouble one has taken to be a modern man, one has come back under the spell of a primitive awe, wordless and humble.

*

In the centuries before its settlement by white men, one of the most characteristic and pleasing features of the floor of this valley, and of the stream banks on its slopes, were the forests and the groves of great beech trees. With their silver bark and their light graceful foliage, turning gold in the fall, they were surely as lovely as any forests that ever grew on earth. I think so because I have seen their diminished descendents that have returned to stand in the wasted places that we have so quickly misused and given up. But those old forests are all gone. We will never know them as they were. We have driven them beyond the reach of our minds, only a vague hint of their presence returning to haunt us, as though in dreams—a fugitive rumor of the nobility and beauty and abundance of the squandered maidenhood of our world—so that, do what we will, we will never quite be satisfied ever again to be here.

The country, as we have made it by the pretense that we can do without it as soon as we have completed its metamorphosis into cash, no longer holds even the possibility of such forests, for the

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topsoil that they made and stood upon, like children piling up and tramping underfoot the fallen leaves, is no longer here.

It is thought that the beech forests of the Midwest, in the time before the white invasion, produced an annual nut crop of a billion bushels. Suppose that early in our history we had learned, like the Indians, to make use of this bounty, and of the rest of the natural produce of the country. We would have been unimaginably different, and would have been less in need of forgiveness. Instead of asking what was already here that might be of use to us, we hastened to impose on the face of the new country, like the scraps and patches of a collage, the fields and the crop rows and the fences of Europe. We destroyed the abundance that lay before us simply by being unwilling or unable to acknowledge that it was there. We did not know where we were, and to avoid the humility and the labor of our ignorance, we pretended to be where we had come from. And so there is a sense in which we are still not here. Because we have ignored the place we have come to, our presence here remains curiously accidental, as though we came by misapprehension or mistake, like birds driven out to sea by a storm.

We still want to be Europeans. We have abandoned Europe only reluctantly and only by necessity. We tried for two hundred years to grow the European grape here, without success, before turning to the development of the native vines that abounded in variety and in health in all parts of the country.

*

There is an ominous—perhaps a fatal—presumptuousness, like the *hybris* of the ancient kings, in living in a place by the *imposition* on it of one's preconceived or inherited ideas and wishes. And that is the way we white people have lived in America throughout our history, and it is the way our history now teaches us to live here.

Surely there could be a more indigenous life than we have. There could be a consciousness that would establish itself on a place by understanding the place's nature and learning what is potential in it. A man ought to study the wilderness of a place before applying to it the ways he learned in another place. Thou-

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sands of acres of hill land, here and in the rest of the country, were wasted by a system of agriculture that was fundamentally alien to it. For more than a century, here, the steepest hillsides were farmed, by my forefathers and their neighbors, as if they were flat, and as if this was not a country of heavy rains. And that symbolizes well enough how alien we remain, in our behavior and in our thoughts, to our country. We haven't yet, in any meaningful sense, arrived in these places that we declare we own. We undertook the privilege of the virgin abundance of this land without any awareness at all that we undertook at the same time a responsibility toward it. That responsibility has never yet impressed itself upon our character; its absence in us is signified on the land by scars.

Until we understand what the land is, we are at odds with everything we touch. And to come to that understanding it is necessary, even now, to leave the regions of our conquest—the cleared fields, the towns and cities, the highways—and re-enter the woods. For only there can a man encounter the silence and the darkness of his own absence. Only in that silence and darkness can he recover the sense of the world's longevity, of its ability to thrive without him, of his inferiority to it and his dependence on it. Perhaps then, having heard that silence and seen that darkness, he will grow humble before the place and begin to take it in—to learn *from it* what it is. As its sounds come into his hearing, and its lights and colors come into his vision, and its odors come into his nostrils, then he may come into *its* presence as he never has before, and he will arrive in his place and will want to remain. His life will grow out of the ground like the other lives of the place, and take its place among them. He will be *with* them—neither ignorant of them, nor indifferent to them, nor against them—and so at last he will grow to be native-born. That is, he must re-enter the silence and the darkness, and be born again.

One winter night nearly twenty years ago I was in the woods with the coon hunters, and we were walking toward the dogs who had moved out to the point of the bluff where the valley of Cane Run enters the valley of the river. The footing was difficult, and one of the hunters was having trouble with his lantern. The flame would "run up" and smoke the globe, so that the light it gave obscured more than it illuminated, an obstacle between his eyes

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and the path. At last he cursed it and flung it down into a hollow. Its little light went looping down through the trees and disappeared, and there was a distant tinkle of glass as the globe shattered. After that he saw better and went along the bluff easier than before, and lighter too.

Not long ago, walking up there, I came across his old lantern lying rusted in the crease of the hill, half buried already in the siftings of the slope, and I let it lie. But I've kept the memory that it renewed. I have made it one of my myths of the hill. It has come to be truer to me now then it was then.

For I have turned aside from much that I knew, and have given up much that went before. What will not bring me, more certainly than before, to where I am is of no use to me. I have stepped out of the clearing into the woods. I have thrown away my lantern, and I can see the dark.

*

In order to know the hill it is necessary to slow the mind down, imaginatively at least, to the hill's pace. For the hill, like Valéry's sycamore, is a voyager standing still. Never moving a step, it travels through years, seasons, weathers, days and nights. These are the measures of its time, and they alter it, marking their passage on it as on a man's face. The hill has never observed a Christmas or an Easter or a Fourth of July. It has nothing to do with a dial or a calendar. Time is told in it mutely and immediately, with perfect accuracy, as it is told by the heart in the body. Its time is the birth and the flourishing and the death of the many lives that are its life.

*

The hill is like an old woman, all her human obligations met, who sits at work day after day, in a kind of rapt leisure, at an intricate embroidery. She has time for all things. Because she does not expect ever to be finished, she is endlessly patient with details. She perfects flower and leaf, feather and song, adorning the briefest life in great beauty as though it were meant to last forever.

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*

In the early spring I climb up through the woods to an east-facing bluff where the bloodroot bloom in scattered colonies around the foot of the rotting monument of a tree trunk. The sunlight is slanting, clear, through the leafless branches. The flowers are white and perfect, delicate as though shaped in air and water. There is a fragility about them that communicates how short a time they will last. There is some subtle bond between them and the dwindling great trunk of the dead tree. There comes on me a pressing wish to imitate them and so preserve them. But I know that what draws me to them would not pass over into anything I can *do*. They will be lost. In a few days none will be here. Suddenly I want to be, I don't know which, a worshipper or a god.

*

Coming upon a mushroom growing out of a pad of green moss between the thick roots of an oak, the sun and the dew still there together, I have felt my mind irresistibly become small, to inhabit that place, leaving me standing vacant and bewildered, like a boy whose captured field mouse has just leaped out of his hand.

*

As I slowly fill with the knowledge of this place, and sink into it, I come to the sense that my life here is inexhaustible, that its possibilities lie rich behind and ahead of me, that when I am dead it will not be used up.

*

Too much that we do is done at the expense of something else, or somebody else. There is some intransigent destructiveness in us. My days, though I think I know better, are filled with a thousand irritations, worries, regrets for what has happened and fears for what may, trivial duties, meaningless torments—as destructive of my life as if I wanted to be dead. Take today for what it is, I counsel myself. Let it be enough.

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And I dare not, for fear that if I do yesterday will infect tomorrow. We are in the habit of contention—against the world, against each other, against ourselves.

It is not from ourselves that we will learn to be better than we are.

*

In spite of all the talk about the law of tooth and fang and the struggle for survival, there is in the lives of the animals and birds a great peacefulness. It is not all fear and flight, pursuit and killing. That is part of it, certainly; and there is cold and hunger; there is the likelihood that death, when it comes, will be violent. But there is peace, too, and I think that the intervals of peace are frequent and prolonged. These are the times when the creature rests, communes with himself or with his kind, takes pleasure in being alive.

This morning while I wrote I was aware of a fox squirrel hunched in the sunlight on a high elm branch beyond my window. The night had been frosty, and now the warmth returned. He stayed there a long time, warming and grooming himself. Was he not at peace? Was his life not pleasant to him then?

I have seen the same peacefulness in a flock of wood ducks perched above the water in the branches of a fallen beech, preening and dozing in the sunlight of an autumn afternoon. Even while they dozed they had about them the exquisite alertness of wild things. If I had shown myself they would have been instantly in the air. But for the time there was no alarm among them, and no fear. The moment was whole in itself, deeply satisfying both to them and to me.

Or the sense of it may come with watching a flock of cedar waxwings eating wild grapes in the top of the woods on a November afternoon. Everything they do is leisurely. They pick the grapes with a curious deliberation, comb their feathers, converse in high windy whistles. Now and then one will fly out and back in a sort of dancing flight full of whimsical flutters and turns. They are like farmers loafing in their own fields on Sunday. Though they have no Sundays, their days are full of sabbaths.

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One clear fine morning in early May, when the river was flooded, my friend and I came upon four rough-winged swallows circling over the water that was still covered with frail wisps and threads of mist from the cool night. They were bathing, dipping down to the water until they touched the still surface with a little splash. They wound their flight over the water like the graceful falling loops of a fine cord. Later they perched on a dead willow, low to the water, to dry and groom themselves, the four together. We paddled the canoe almost within reach of them before they flew. They were neat beautiful gentle birds. Sitting there preening in the sun after their cold bath, they communicated a sense of domestic integrity, the serenity of living within order. We didn't belong within the order of the events and needs of their day, and so they didn't notice us until they had to.

*

But there is not only peacefulness, there is joy. And the joy, less deniable in its evidence than the peacefulness, is the confirmation of it. I sat one summer evening and watched a great blue heron make his descent from the top of the hill into the valley. He came down at a measured deliberate pace, stately as always, like a dignitary going down a stair. And then, at a point I judged to be midway over the river, without at all varying his wingbeat he did a backward turn in the air, a loop-the-loop. It could only have been a gesture of pure exuberance, of joy—a speaking of his sense of the evening, the day's fulfillment, his descent homeward. He made just the one slow turn, and then flew on out of sight in the direction of a slue farther down in the bottom. The movement was incredibly beautiful, at once exultant and stately, a benediction on the evening and on the river and on me. It seemed so perfectly to confirm the presence of a free non-human joy in the world—a joy I feel a great need to believe in—that I had the skeptic's impulse to doubt that I had seen it. If I had, I thought, it would be a sign of the presence of something heavenly in the earth. And then, one evening a year later, I saw it again.

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Every man is followed by a shadow which is his death—dark, featureless and mute. And for every man there is a place where his shadow is clarified and is made his reflection, where his face is mirrored in the ground. He sees his source and his destiny, and they are acceptable to him. He becomes the follower of what pursued him. What hounded his track becomes his companion.

That is the myth of my search and my return.

*

I have been walking in the woods, and have lain down on the ground to rest. It is the middle of October and around me, all through the woods, the leaves are quietly sifting down. The newly fallen leaves make a dry comfortable bed, and I lie easy, coming to rest within myself as I seem to do nowdays only when I am in the woods.

And now a leaf, spiraling down in wild flight, lands on my shirt front at about the third button below the collar. At first I am bemused and mystified by the coincidence—that the leaf should have been so hung, weighted and shaped, so ready to fall, so nudged loose and slanted by the breeze, as to fall where I, by the same delicacy of circumstance, happened to be lying. The event, among all its ramifying causes and considerations, and finally its mysteries, begins to take on the magnitude of history. Portent begins to dwell in it.

And suddenly I apprehend in it the dark proposal of the ground. Under the fallen leaf my breastbone burns with imminent decay. Other leaves fall. My body begins its long shudder into humus. I feel my substance escape me, carried into the mold by beetles and worms. Days, winds, seasons pass over me as I sink under the leaves. For a time only sight is left to me, a passive awareness of the sky overhead, birds crossing, the mazed interreaching of the treetops, the leaves falling—and then that too sinks away. It is acceptable to me, and I am at peace.

When I move to go it is as though I rise up out of the world.

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SUZANNE GROSS

Red Carpenter

for Jack

The first time that I ever saw
the thing that haunts me now
was that one winter night when I
was sitting drinking beer

and talking with my landlord just
as I had done a dozen
nights before that night: but then,
as I had never done

I saw him by some starker light
than any sun's that I
am used to, seeing then what I
had only looked at before.

The bamboo bones that shaped his hands
to hold that glass of gold
and lift it shone right through his skin
as though his bones themselves

were naked as his hand and there
was no flesh there but light.
I saw the way that blood and bone
and scar-shot flesh were bent

to be no other, only him,
and saw the like of this
would never come again, nor mine,
nor any man's that is.

How strange the things we know most certainly
and need the most to know must hunt us down
and corner us to make us face themselves

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and face our knowing them; how wonderful
the hurt we fear and hide from has to nail
itself so deeply through our hands and eyes
before we can become so brave we can
bear the greater pain that shall reveal
forever what we know, wonderful
and strange.

It was so cold it hurt to breathe
the day I went with Penny down to Buck's.
We hadn't seen each other for a month
or more and we had may things we had
to say. We talked, and read aloud; we drank;
we played the song I like the best, that tells
about the corn and morning sky, the bright
lover's hair. I could have heard it more,
the banjo and the sad harmonica
cry and clanging in me all day long.

At three o'clock three carpenters walked in.
They set a dollar pitcher full of beer
between us, filled our glasses, and began
to talk to us: three men we never saw
before, as they had not seen us. We were
alone, the five of us, in Buck's back room.
They said the tallest of the three was Red,
the plump one Farmer, though he didn't look
like one to me; the little man was Moses,
but they called him Little Jesus: he

was foreman on the job they all were on.
They told us what they make an hour, how hard
they work, and how they whistle at the girls
from where they stand six storeys in the air;
and how they'd like to chase them with the cranes.
They said the girls liked being whistled at,
and asked us if we didn't think so too.
We said we knew for certain that they did.
They would be working in Milwaukee now,
they said, they would be driving home from work

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at night, that's every night, and all of them
were from the towns of north Wisconsin, Breed,
and Mishicot, Oconto Falls, because
there's nothing much for them to do at night
but going home. I felt the dark come close,
and saw their faces in the faint green light
from dashboards; then I saw those other men,
who drive alone at night to be alone
with loneliness or need; and very sharp
and deep inside me somewhere someone said

Pay attention, nothing ever is
what you would like to think it is. The shock
of knowing whose voice spoke in me brought
all my senses blazing on like banks
of floodlights on a baseball field at night.
When Little Jesus sat beside me then
I welcomed him, and welcomed Red when he
sat down with Penny. Farmer asked me if
I was a freshman: I was flattered not
angry as I would have been before:

I was thirty-four for heaven's sake.
They found out that I was a poet too.
The Farmer asked me to recite: I said
I was too sleepy to; he shouted out
"If Red there takes you out tonight you won't
want any sleep." He said it twice: the air
was sparked and strained with complicated need
that none of us would dare admit before.
The threads of something I had once let go
began to gather in my eyes. I saw.

They told us more about their work and pay:
the laying of the plywood pads and forms
they make to pour cement in, and how much
they get a foot for stripping when it's cured,
and how much less when all the pads are left.
Their eyes and voices shifted from their pride
in what they are to gripes about their pay,

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as if complaining were atonement for
the guilt of loving what they do. I saw
how Farmer's even teeth grew slanted back;

the bluish diamond points of light that stood
on every crest of black hard curling hair;
the way his faded sweatshirt cast a glow
around his face and warmed the skin
like glass that soft light burned inside. I saw
the size and shape and place of every tear
that ravelled in his hooded shirt and all
the shades of red the sun had bleached it to.
I saw that Little Jesus' lips were crumpled,
as he spoke his upper lip would glance

and wrinkle like the waves along the far
horizon of the sea. His eyes were brown,
with paler smears like fingerprints in paint,
and little cones of light shone out of them.
He had the finest hands: the kind of hands
that have their own perfected tolerance;
that can take hold of anything and set
it into place; that only need to touch
things once to get them right. The way they lay
so stilly on the table told it all.

I wanted more than once to kiss his hand:
I knew no better way to tell him what
I saw. Perhaps he would have understood,
but I was too afraid of what I thought
he might have thought I meant. I saw the light
that poured down Penny's hair and how her features
moved through lights and shadows of her hair
as brown as water over last year's leaves.
I wanted then to touch her face, and thought:
am I the only one in all the world

whose eyes are in their lips, the only one
whose plainest words are touch? I thought I was.
I looked across at Red and felt his face

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repeated on my face with thin sharp knives:
the chlorinated water of his eyes;
the tangled skein of tiny ruptured veins
that webbed his cheeks in spectrums of his blood;
the thickened ellipse of his mouth; what red
and restless hands he had, with ridged and blunt
gray nails. He spoke as if he were afraid

his voice would jackknife in his throat. The pins
of reddish stubble on his jaw drove in
my eyes. He talked to Penny, not to me,
leaning at her more and more as she
drew back into the corner of the booth
and gleamed inside her hair. There was a lot
of talk of going to Sheboygan Falls:
I knew that Red was asking Penny please
to go, and that she wanted to be free
enough to want to go, and was ashamed

for him to beg. I knew if she refused
to go with him, or if she went with him,
she wouldn't come to any harm. And so
I left, because I thought my leaving might
precipitate decision; and because
I had already had too much to drink,
and had to drive; because I had remembered
what I wanted to forget; because
I wanted to forget again. I ran
away and so it had to hunt me down.

As soon as I was in the car she ran
to it and threw herself inside. I turned
the key and was about to drive away
when Red walked up and leaned against the door.
He reached his hand across my chest to her,
she held it, and I felt the weight of both
their arms like fallen logs across my breast.
I saw his wrist between the wheel and me,
and Penny's, like the ankle of a deer,
and both their hands that clung above the sheer

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abyss of death. I knew the thing he asked
her for and all at once my breath tore right
across like paper and a haemorrhage
of tears broke out of me. I cried out loud,
and terribly, as helpless children cry
whose hope is savaged in them by the dumb
injustice of adults. And there was worse
to come. He touched my face and looked at me,
and said "Don't cry, dear. You're a good girl too."
And then he kissed me simply on the mouth.

Whatever death may do with us
I know that heaven is
no place: it is a time to come
when we shall still have all

these imperfections we see now;
the scars, the precious flaws,
the marks of earth that has been dear
to us. Then we shall dare

to say to all we always owed
it to: How beautiful
we knew they were, deserving praise,
and worthy to be loved.

Landlord

for Jack

His farm is stone, is the sea's floor
thrust up at a fault in the land,
the little earth that covers it
sown with fossil shells, old leather,
lengths of chain. As soon as he was

dead, the wind broke into his barn
and put its flawed blue windows out.
Now the brown thrasher makes her nest
in the spring teeth of his harrow
rabbits breed under his quonset

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house and pine snakes sleep in his bed.
The pair of hawks that had his woods
hunt lower, and farther from home.
Inside the barn his harnesses
and bridles hang shingled with mold.

When the last of his horses died off,
or was sold, or was given away,
he could paint his plow white and bolt it
in concrete for the barn-shaped mailbox,
or set it in a ring of flowers
with a birdbath and reflecting globe;

or give it away to the local
museum, labelled for his sister's
children's children's teaching; or leave it
gone hard aground on the limestone slabs
where the dog and scarlet tanager
lie still in their leaf-lined graves. Time was

when the bridal wreath unbound the hedges
of its leaves, farmers came into the town
to plow the gardens and potato fields
that fed us all through the wartime. They came
with such outmoded plows, as the gardens
and fields were so small; and they brought their prize
pulling teams, matched and trained as foals, and all
they had left. And every spring I would
follow the man who broke my father's ground,
standing at the field's edge in the lovely
light of after school, to let his horses
and his plow and him cut open my eyes.

All time of my becoming is that team
and the grace of the plow moving over
all the land I saw as one: the tingle
of trace-chains and clicking rings of yellow
bone on the hames; and the flash of the light
from the buckles and bosses, all plated
with nickel, they wore; the red cords that bound

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their shining hair like the hair of the loved
and long-dead queens. They were the chivalry
I cared for and believed; the man that held
all this in his hands, and was bound to it
all by lines across his back and shoulder,
was the hero at the turning of my
youth, as he is now. So from time to time

his goodness gave me his place. The heavy
leather where he laid it on my shoulder
cut a red line like the welt of a whip
in my flesh. Then it was my hands the plow
handles burned and all my little aching
strength weighting the share in the ground; my eyes
rasped with sweat that held the horses' shining
haunches moving ahead of me always
in time and in delicate power; then
it was myself that staggered after them
ankle-deep in the earth; it was my voice
that moved them. That man of my passing spring
could be that man's son, disinherited
now, that I saw win the county pulling
the summer I turned thirteen and saw love

move a mountain of stone. No team could start
the stoneboat any more, though they lay down
to it willing to die, and the drivers
cried them on till they kept still for pity
and walked their teams away. Then in their turn,
the two blood-bays came in ringing their best
black harness like a carillon, their mouths
open wide and working up foam, the red
and yellow tassels whirling in their manes;
at such a burning trot, though their driver
leaned backward with his whole weight on the lines,
they brought him up running, breathless and red.
Then they danced to the singletrees sideways;
the sound of the trace-chains dropping into place
rammed them into their collars in a lunge,

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but nothing gave and they stood still, leaning
their heads closer together, and trembling.

The man began to speak to them, saying
their names to them softly; each time he spoke,
they sank their haunches lower to the ground,
and doubled up their pasterns till it hurt
to look at them. Still they crouched down, until
each muscle started in a bunch of steel
swelling the skin of their shoulders and hams,
sweat running over their bodies in streams
as branching as blood. Broken at the knees,
the man too sank to the ground with his team,
still saying their names, till the muscles jumped
and fluttered on their wet bellies and flanks,
and they crawled from the pit they had dug there
with their hooves, crawled away with the stoneboat
shrieking and smoking behind them, and crawled
until they won and he stopped them, blinded
with tears; and the drivers who lost stood still
where the stoneboat had stood, and wept for pride.

We need to believe our loving it
changes the earth as our loving
it changes us; that any trust
or forbearing of ours, the way
we touch what comes into our hands,
shall after all create the new

earth that is the only heaven
we can both want and believe in,
when horses and hawks will tell us
what their true names and our own are.
We have to think we help it be,

believing it ours to redeem
all things that die here, all that grow,
with this the secret of our joy:
Scray's hill is that mountain, we know,
where they shall not hurt or destroy.

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RICHARD WILBUR

For Dudley

Even when death has taken
An exceptional man,
It is common things which touch us, gathered
In the house that proved a hostel.

Though on his desk there lie
The half of a sentence
Not to be finished by us, who lack
His gaiety, his Greek,

It is the straight back
Of a good woman
Which now we notice. For her guests' hunger
She sets the polished table.

And now the quick sun,
Rounding the gable,
Picks out a chair, a vase of flowers,
Which had stood till then in shadow.

It is the light of which
Achilles spoke,
Himself a shadow then, recalling
The splendor of mere being.

As if we were perceived
From a black ship—
A small knot of island folk,
The Light-Dwellers, pouring

A life to the dark sea—
All that we do
Is touched with ocean, yet we remain
On the shore of what we know.

We say that we are behaving
As he would have us—

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He who was brave and loved this world,
Who did not hold with weeping,

Yet in the mind as in
The shut closet
Where his coats hang in black procession,
There is a covert muster.

One is moved to turn to him,
The exceptional man,
Telling him all these things, and waiting
For the deft, lucid answer.

At the sound of that voice's deep
Specific silence,
The sun winks and fails in the window.
Light perpetual keep him.

Matthew VIII, 28 ff.

Rabbi, we Gadarenes
Are not ascetics; we are fond of wealth and possessions.
Love, as you call it, we obviate by means
Of the planned release of aggressions.

We have deep faith in prosperity.
Soon, it is hoped, we will reach our full potential.
In the light of our gross product, the practice of charity
Is palpably inessential.

It is true that we go insane;
That for no good reason we are possessed by devils;
That we suffer, despite the amenities which obtain
At all but the lowest levels.

We shall not, however, resign
Our trust in the high-heaped table and the full trough.
If you cannot cure us without destroying our swine,
We had rather you shoved off.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Swimming Chenango Lake

Winter will bar the swimmer soon.
He reads the water's autumnal hesitations
A wealth of ways: it is jarred,
It is astir already despite its steadiness,
Where the first leaves at the first
Tremor of the morning air have dropped
Anticipating him, launching their imprints
Outwards in eccentric, overlapping circles.
There is a geometry of water, for this
Squares off the clouds' redundances
And sets them floating in a nether atmosphere
All angles and elongations: every tree
Appears a cypress as it stretches there
And every bush that shows the season,
A shaft of fire, It is a geometry and not
A fantasia of distorting forms, but each
Liquid variation answerable to the theme
It makes away from, plays before:
It is a consistency, the grain of the pulsating flow.
But he has looked long enough, and now
Body must recall the eye to its dependence
As he scissors the waterscape apart
And sways it to tatters. Its coldness
Holding him to itself, he grants the grasp,
For to swim is also to take hold
On water's meaning, to move in its embrace
And to be, between grasp and grasping free.
He reaches in-and-through to that space
The body is heir to, making a where
In water, a possession to be relinquished
Willingly at each stroke. The image he has torn
Flows-to behind him, healing itself,
Lifting and lengthening, splayed like the feathers
Down an immense wing whose darkening spread

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Shadows his solitariness: alone, he is unnamed
By this baptism, where only Chenango bears a name
In a lost language he begins to construe—
A speech of densities and derisions, of half-
Replies to the questions his body must frame
Frogwise across the all but penetrable element.
Human, he fronts it and, human, he draws back
From the interior cold, the mercilessness
That yet shows a kind of mercy sustaining him.
The last sun of the year is drying his skin
Above a surface a mere mosaic of tiny shatterings,
Where a wind is unscaping all images in the flowing obsidian,
The going-elsewhere of ripples incessantly shaping.

The View

The woods are preparing to wait out winter.
Gusts blow with an earnest of all there is to be done
Once frost will have entered the apple and the sun.
Of the view, there is no tale to tell you.
Its history is incidental. One would not date
The window that stands open like a gate
In the opposing house-face. It is dark inside.
The façade is a dirty white, and yet it seems
The right colour to stand there between
The dull green of the foreground trees
Still bearing leaves, and the autumnal glare
From the others framing it, forgoing theirs.
The dark of the window square might be
A mineshaft of pure shadow, a way
Through to the heart of the hill—the black
Centre, if centre there were where
Sight must travel such drops and intervals,
And an undulation of aspens along the slope
Is turning the wind to water and to light,
Unpivoting place amid its shaken coins,
While under a shuddering causeway, a currency,
The season is dragging at all the roots of the view.

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JYOTIRMOY DATTA

Seven Poems by Benoy Mojumdar

Translated from the Bengali

*

Our experience is like these sharp valleys—
limited, sealed off, the mountainsides prickly with pine,
although now the rough ridges and streams
are erased in a general mist.

It is like the cactus tongues of kittens;
of all the marvellous tastes possible to more polished palate
many surely are beyond a cat's experience,
and yet those that it knows must be sharper,
defiant like the thorns of flowers,
beyond common comprehension like the gooseflecked sky
bristling with the points of stars.

Across the enormous spaces range the mighty winds
not always in unison for they often clash
which is why there is always a cyclone gathering somewhere
but these clashes cannot distract the pines
they rear upward in unwavering desire
like rustgreen lightning striking heavenward
rejoicing in the thunderous kisses of their fickle blue mates.

*

What is needed is a sudden turn
leaving the swift hand that plucks butterflies out of the air
gaping, at a loss.
The others exist pale and ghostly as stars
brought to brief life by a total eclipse of the sun.
But I cannot change my course now; can the leopard
unspin its leap in midair?
Moreover, they may still be wrong. She can yet appear.
Cream rises only if one lets boiling milk stand and cool.

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*

If you never come again, never blow through these steaming regions
like cooling drifts of the upper air, even that absence is an encounter.
Your absence is as of the blue rose
from the kingdom of flowers. Who knows, some day
you may yet appear. Maybe you have, only you are too close.
Can I smell my own hair?
Marvellous sights have been seen.
A full moon was to have risen last night—
only a quivering sickle appeared!
It was an eclipse.

*

The pain remained with me a long time.
Finally the ancient root was cut—
from immersion I emerged blinking into light.
I am restored to health now though the season is gray.
Surgery everywhere; this tea table was once the flesh of a tree.
I have given up strewing grain on the ground
to have the birds join me at lunch.
Only when the baby is cut adrift
does it have its free hunger and thirst;
like taking off a blindfold to be confronted with
a curtain, being born
into this vast uterus, lined with a sky porous with stars.

*

No there is nothing left to see except the sky with its distances.
Of all the sun's family only comets have heat
and if the sky be blue the tint is mostly in my yearning eyes
there is only this waiting, this gathering stillness, this silent fall
all yearning gathered into the pouting mouth of a raindrop
I fall unendingly with nothing but the sky left to watch.

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*

A whole year I spent in conversations with fire.
I carry its warmth with me now
being in a state of perpetual fever.
Although I have retreated into an igloo
I can see the fever spreading
the woods are turning yellow

The fever heightens certain pleasures, though. The dry mouth
conjures memories of sharp sauces
succulent meat wallowing in gravy
the famished body would make love to them, tongue to tongue.

*

From appearances I learn to sift the facts.
It is a trick of the eye and the air
the sky by itself is never blue
and you are gone without a stain like a wave
that left passing wrinkles on the sand

yes, I know it is the clouds that drift
and not the skidding moon
and you are clean and effortlessly gone
like milk into a child's bones

birds on swaying branches perhaps think
that branches shake of their own accord
without any tickling by the wind
but I wonder if it crossed your mind
that the lonely trees live in your breath alone.

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WILLIAM EMPSON

Volpone

A GOOD DEAL OF STANDARDIZATION of opinion and critical method become necessary when Eng. Lit. became a large profession, and I think the results are often mistaken; but it is naturally hard to make my colleagues agree with any such judgement. The best opportunity is where the credibility gap appears at an unexpected place—where the university teachers or examiners feel slightly appalled at the apparently orthodox opinions which the children (whose schoolteachers usually retain more hold upon their loyalty and affection than any later teacher) write sturdily down. When I first met Professor L. C. Knights, which was fairly recently at Gambier, Ohio, there was some mention of the yearly examinations, and he said, "The very saddest time of all." I said, "You mean you find the students haven't followed what you told them?" "Well, of course, there is that too," he said, "but sometimes, you know, they have." This delicacy of feeling proved at once that he was not a Leavisite in any harmful way. Thinking it over, I doubt whether he had literally said these things which he did not like to read in an answer; they would be deductions from his position, or parodies of it, which he had not foreseen the need for a warning against. I fancy that the salutary shock which he adumbrated here arises more frequently about Ben Jonson than about any other standard author. The argument has a more direct impact upon an English than an American professional, because in England a large proportion of the students who are being prepared to read Eng. Lit. at university have to pass examinations in either *Volpone* or *The Alchemist* (to which the same troubles apply in a rather different way); but many of my American colleagues would feel the same shock if faced with the same documents.

What the children write down is a good deal hotter and cruder that most of the stuff in the textbooks, but it is the same grand muddle which appeared so novel and charming about half a century ago. They write: "Volpone is a miser. The play does nothing but denounce misers, and he is the worst one, because he worships his gold. All the characters are loathsome except the

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young couple, and they are subnormal because they talk in a conventional poetic style; but Volpone is the most loathsome, as he blasphemes. Jonson had a theory about plays, that they ought to make you sick of being wicked, and the reason why his plays are so good is that they make you so sick. They are written in poetry which is meant to excite contempt and nausea, and that is why it is such good poetry. Good people enjoy these plays very much, though they are in pain all the time, aching for the tortures to begin." It is extraordinary to me that a man can "mark" a large number of these answers straight on end and still believe what they say.

At first I thought I knew an immediate reply: that Volpone cannot be a miser, because he offers to lavish upon Celia his whole fortune—he is a "dashing" lover, which was an equally familiar type, and a quite different one. But my opponents had been properly indoctrinated, and would readily answer that this minor error in characterisation, necessary for the plot, was not risked till the "type" of Volpone had been established firmly. I made a point of asking whether the students who wrote and argued like this had ever seen a performance of "Punch and Judy," at the seaside perhaps, and they all said they had, though of course only long, long before. So it is not true that there had been any "failure of tradition," only that a false tradition, like a cuckoo's egg, had been imposed.

Jonson himself was prone to instruct his audiences, knowing that he had often been misunderstood, and *Volpone* as he planned it begins with a prologue telling the audience to laugh. Laughing is good for them, he says, and he is not attacking any individual sinners at the moment:

> All gall and copper as from his ink he draineth;
> Only a little salt remaineth.
> Wherewith he'll rub your cheeks till, red with laughter,
> They will look fresh a week after.

Physiological reactions vary with period and fashion a great deal more than we easily realise, and maybe some cheeks actually did go on looking red for several days after the explosions of laughter caused by seeing the famous farce. But, even granting that what the author announces is incredible, a man who chose to start off

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like this could not have intended what the modern students describe—a play of almost unbearable horror, regularly screwing itself up to points which are still more nearly unbearable. It seems plain to me that the pietistic strain in Eng. Lit., as it has developed during the last forty years or so, regularly produces crippled or perverted moral judgements, wholly out of contact with the basic tone of feeling of the older works which they purport to interpret; and I have to say this in a general or pompous way, because I find that when I make jokes intended to say it lightly they are regarded as merely in bad taste.

It was quite frequent on the sands, as I remember, for one of the kids to bellow because "Punch" was too hard to take, and this unfortunate would be carried away by its nurse; but the elder children, when I was one, proud that they could take it, would laugh on till the final hanging of Punch as their Victorian parents had done at the same age. I have been secretly afraid of the theatre ever since, but I feel I know what it is about. However, the harshness is not invariable; "rogue sentiment" does not have to be offset by this primitive bitter flavour. The first audiences of *The Winter's Tale* (and they were Jonson's public too) enjoyed seeing Autolycus pick pockets, and readily agreed that he was at bottom a good man, who would help the lovers and thus forward the plot; though in real life they would have got him hanged if they had caught him. You may decide that rogue sentiment is a rather silly self-indulgence, but that is no reason for blinding yourself to its frequent occurrence in plays.

After the Prologue, the curtain opens on Volpone worshipping his gold, a handsome piece of rhetoric, intended of course to establish the main theme powerfully at once. I agree that the references, though classical rather than Christian, are meant to imply that worshipping gold is a bad thing; and at first the audience necessarily supposes that Volpone is being satirized, since he is the only character yet in view. But an actor, however much he has been lectured by symbolist critics, feels bound to treat the soliloquy as satire intended by the character. The mind of Volpone needs to be presented as powerful and rather sinister; to make him an earnest gold-worshipper would reduce him to a quirky eccentric. Mosca then starts flattering Volpone, and the audience must assume, while rapidly picking up the social situation, that these things are what Volpone likes to be told—it gives a

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slightly unusual, therefore less boring, kind of dramatic exposition. They hear at once that Volpone is morally much better than the other rich men in Venice, never hurting the poor at all, and is positively the opposite of a miser because his occupation and his delight is to cheat misers as they deserve. No wonder we found him mocking them when alone—Jonson expects the audience to reinterpret the "imagery" when it appreciates the "character." The presumption of our modern literary critics that no audience could jump this little fence amounts to presuming that all audiences are subhuman.

I do not mean to deny that the lead-in of the play is consistent with its whole plot and setting; indeed, the setting made the plot seem almost credible. London was jealous of Venice, as an aggressive leader of international maritime trade, because London wanted to do that on a bigger scale. "Terrible pigs, that tyrannous Council of Ten; they never think of anything but money"—Jonson could rely upon getting this reaction even from business men in his audience, while most of the audience were enjoying the play as a satire upon business men. Naturally, Volpone is tainted by the society which has produced him, and seems unable to imagine any directly good way of life—cheating the cheats is about all he can rise to. As the play develops, this comes to seem pathetic; but one cannot feel sure that the effect is intended, because the frame of mind of Jonson is so close to that of his hero. The story goes that he conceived this play (as a triumphant popular farce) and the *Masque of Blackness* (as delightful for the court) together in a debtors' prison, and felt confident that they would set him up, as they did. So far as he identifies himself with Volpone it is because of the enthusiasm of his own break-through into fortune, which he need not be supposed to regard morosely.

We next meet the three unappetizing deviants, dwarf, eunuch and hermaphrodite, whom Volpone keeps for his amusement or pleasure, and I can't deny that he seems here particularly short of ideas for gracious living. But as Velasquez was just then painting the similar figures who satisfied the Court of Spain it would be hard to argue that Jonson was malignantly making his satire worse than the reality. We are hampered in reading, here and later (e.g. the rhymes here about the previous incarnations of the hermaphrodite, and later the prose speech of Volpone as mountebank), by a fault which is regularly corrected in production; Jonson used to

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add words for the printer whenever he felt touchily proud of an effect which had failed on the stage, and these bits need taking out again. The audience would accept three hours from Shakespeare but only two and a half from Jonson, and he was in an uneasy relation, resentful though admiring, to his older and more experienced rival. Now, Shakespeare had been winning all hearts by the breadth of poetry of his clowns, and Jonson had never quite accepted them—nor would we, if we had to meet them. It is cheerful to imagine the immense decisiveness with which the present Elizabeth would silence her Royal Clown, if forced to have one. Still, the formula of Erasmus was well within the powers of sympathy of Jonson, and the final lyric of the scene here (Fools, they are the only nation) comes off very well. Nowadays many critics assume that the first audiences would regard the scene as an attack on the top-class habit of keeping a resident clown, and this, I do submit, is quite unhistorical. So far from that, the mountainous scholar would be simpering as he held the pose in his spangled tights; he would expect to be as much loved for it as Feste or Touchstone. How cross he would be if he heard our modern experts praise the scene because it excites so much disgust. We should maybe praise Jonson for bringing a bit of reality into the theme of the pet lunatic, but we cannot say that he meant it to stand out as satire; after all, no Elizabethan playwright except Shakespeare was good at writing the mad talk which they felt to be somehow needed.

The Broken Compass (1958) by E. B. Partridge is a book always on the university shelves which firmly encourages the delusions of the students. It is important to realise, I think, that his remarks about the "imagery" take for granted that you accept passively the words on the page, and never imagine yourself producing the play, telling the actors what to do:

> Mosca tells Corvino the dwarf the fool and the eunuch are only a few of Volpone's many bastards . . . may be talking loosely . . . so far as the imagery is concerned, whether he is telling the truth does not matter, because the connection between Volpone and his "family" is made in the listener's mind.

This presumes that the listener is imbecile, so much broken down by the loathsome theory of Imagism that he is unable to recognise even a farcically plain human situation. What you see on the stage, when Mosca tells this lie to Corvino, is Volpone wrestling not to

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betray his trick by exploding with laughter; Mosca has told it merely in order to tease him. At least, there is no other effective way to act the thing, but I recognise that a decisive moral judgement has to be made before the producer accepts the obvious here. A pietistic reader immediately gulps down the bit of scandal (though not because of "imagery"—that is only an excuse; *what* image?). But the type of spectator Jonson relied upon getting was eager for the horrible old miser to be deceived, and regarded his pious affectation of shock on hearing the scandal as further gross hypocrisy. This man was not tempted to believe the scandal, because for him it was not even part of the "atmosphere." Mallarmé and Verlaine, it seems fair to remember, did not employ their treasured Symbolism to insinuate scandal, as at a cats' tea-party; this bold application of the method was invented by our pious Establishment critics. But maybe the great anti-intellectual movement did rather deserve to be misused.

Volpone is an extremist or desperate character, I do not deny; that is why he is equipped to show us the commercial Hell of Venice; but he is on our side against it, as the earlier literary guides through Hell had always been. We are expected to feel a basic sympathy for him, as for Punch; and this is the chief source of the poetry of the play. Simple-minded readers, and I too, expect poetry to have a certain warmth and expansiveness, even a feeling of generosity, though this may perhaps be given merely by a process of generalisation, a sudden insight into life as a whole. The modern refusal to recognise this in Jonson is unfair to him. Towards the end of the first Act, when the second horrible old miser totters away after being cheated, Volpone bounds from his sickbed and generalises about them:

> So many cares, so many maladies,
> So many fears attending on old age,
> Yea, death so often called on . . .

and yet they are still so eager to cheat for money that they have become absurdly easy to cheat. Volpone here is remarkably unlike what the students say; he is brooding like an archangel over the self-torturing folly of mankind. Mosca is evidently accustomed to sentiments like this, though he feels more at home when encouraging the sense of triumph:

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VOL. Despatch, despatch; I long to have possession
Of my new present.
MOS. That, and thousands more
I hope to see you lord of.
VOL. Thanks, kind Mosca.
MOS. And that, when I am lost in blended dust,
And thousands such as I am, in succession—
VOL. Nay that were too much Mosca—
MOS. You shall live
Still, to delude these harpies.
VOL. Loving Mosca!
'Tis well; my pillow now, and let him enter.

The golden glow of this poetry is rare in Jonson's plays, and depends here upon a moral sympathy, even if a mixed and fleeting one, from the audience to the comic hero. Mosca and Volpone are right, as well as clever and brave, to cheat the grandees of Venice. To become morally independent of one's formative society in this way is the grandest theme of all literature, because it is the only means of moral progress, the establishment of some higher ethical concept. Our modern neo-Christian critics seem to imply that what Jesus Christ did, let alone Robin Hood and Huckleberry Finn, is particularly contemptible to them; they assume that any established orthodoxy must be supported. I suppose this movement was prophesied by Wyndham Lewis in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), which recommended for us (whatever he meant by it) a total subservience, ready to lick the boots of any policeman in power. No one would deny that to set oneself up as morally independent carries great dangers, even in minor cases, and a play on the topic needs to present them firmly. None the less, the very basis of operation of *Volpone* is the familiar sentiment about the highwayman or the bootlegger, which though it feels obvious to the whole audience is rather complex. Surely it is peculiar that these scholarly critics, who claim to be recovering for us the grand old tradition which we have lost, have less understanding of it than the first man they might ask in the street, and talk as if they were androids from Andromeda.

Going back to the incident of the hero in triumph, just quoted: the audience was sure to laugh because he is shown loving his male flatterer, who must give him a kiss before the words "'Tis well." Volpone indeed hungers for the love of Mosca whenever he is

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triumphant, though he is also ready to enjoy the ladies, and lets drop in Act V that Mosca is no use for sodomy. Italians were assumed to be highly sophisticated in such matters, but the main story here did not seem foreign at all. The life of a successful criminal is miserable unless there is someone he can boast to while he drinks, telling his secrets, and he is bound to love this person because his social isolation does not allow him any other intimacy; and yet this person, by the mere logic of having excluded the rule of law, is committed to betraying him. I never feel sure about the logic of this, and wicked gentry often dodged it, but it was accepted as common experience. Consider the Jew of Malta, who after losing his daughter buys a Turkish slave. He at once wins the heart of this earnest affectionate man by boasting of his crimes, and the slave betrays him to a Maltese prostitute merely because he cannot bear not to boast of his good luck in getting such a wonderfully wicked master. The betrayals of Volpone by Mosca, and of Mosca by Volpone, are I think more deeply felt and understood by the author, but he would regard them as interesting examples of this well-known and accepted moral.

The English visitors need not have much interpretation piled onto them; their chief effect, being ridiculous in a relaxed and fairly homely manner, is to lighten a play which would otherwise be too tense for a comedy. They do show the importance of Venice in the minds of Londoners; Sir Politic imagines himself to be a spy, and it is assumed that this is a recognized line of endeavour. Also, to a slight extent, the contact of these everyday figures with the fantastic Volpone, who is almost too much an antique Roman even to be a Venetian, helps to make him a contact-man for the audience too. This is not done by making him friends with Lady Would-Be, but by making him laugh at her from the same side as the audience. Always a man of restless and powerful intelligence, he is I think the first character in English Literature who is bored by a literary critic. (Hamlet had already been shown as bored, but as a literary critic he is himself fairly boring.) When Lady Would-Be threatens to cheer the sick-bed of Volpone by a survey of the Italian poets, he is almost driven to betray his secret by leaping up and escaping, or so he tells Mosca afterwards to express the violence of his boredom. Mr. Partridge has a splendidly absurd sequence here, which I hope I may be allowed to follow, though it makes a slight digression. As Volpone is expecting to enjoy Celia

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soon after his chat with Mosca, another danger from the visit of Lady Would-Be occurs to him:

> I fear
> Another hell too, that my loathing this
> Will quite expel my appetite to the other.

Mr. Partridge finds here a striking piece of symbolism: "Hell, to this animal, means a loss of appetite; heaven, a gratifying of it." A more refined type of man, I readily agree with my brother critic, would have found his heaven in hearing from Lady Would-Be the type of lecture that we both give. But shortly afterwards Mr. Partridge has an opposite complaint against Volpone, who remarks to Mosca, in a moment of triumph after cheating an old miser, that "the pleasure of all womankind's not in it":

> Here is the perfect perversion of the sexual instinct. Greed and vanity and a debased intelligence have so far debased his normal instincts that the joy of life comes not from giving joy to others but from giving pain.

At least, then, the animal is no longer blamed for being sunk in his instincts, and incapable of the pleasures of the human mind. But also, Volpone intends a hyperbole; he thinks well of the pleasure to be gained from womankind, and uses this to say that the moral pleasure to be gained from penalising a corrupt grandee is especially great. Compassionate Mr. Partridge himself, and moral Ben Jonson too, and the whole audience so far as they can be won over, are all committed to this same line of interest, even if it is true that they had better have stayed in bed with their wives. The denunciation is thus particularly absurd here, but also it distracts attention from the main point, that Volpone is designed to work as a contact-man, sufficiently at home with the London audience to show them Venice.

Naturally, for this purpose he must also be at home in Venice, and there need to be moments when he behaves with a convincing amount of native wickedness. To make him absurd is then the only way to save his popularity, and this is unflinchingly done. The main case is the attempted rape of Celia; traditionally he has been found absurd enough there not to revolt a predominantly male audience, though I have never found it possible to alter the mind of a female student who already considered him a monster,

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Rape is even more unpopular in the theatre than elsewhere, and the incident is a direct cause of the downfall of Volpone; delicate handling is required. Volpone first loves Celia on hearsay only; her beauty is reported by Mosca, in a handsome speech—he must have been told to scout round; it is part of the vanity of Volpone to enjoy the greatest beauties. But also to win their hearts; it does not occur to him that she might *want* to refuse him—to that extent, the attempted rape is merely a technical one. To find the rich old husband willing to sell her, instead of having to be cheated, was a great extra pleasure for Volpone; it showed he deserved to be cheated even more than Volpone had supposed. The lady herself, he still assumed, he could woo with his real charms, chief among them his poetic imagination. I am not sure what Jonson felt about this, or meant the audience to feel, but I expect he considered the behaviour of Volpone straightforward. He offers Celia classical charades in expensive fancy dress, and a modern reader is not surprised when she treats his speeches as merely gabble adding to her torment. But Jonson himself had just discovered that he could handle the Court by this method, and win a comfortable life by it for a long while. I expect he could hardly imagine wooing a lady in any other way. And then again, there is a rather puzzling wholeheartedness in the lyrical effect when Volpone offers Celia

> A diamond, would have bought Lollia Paulina
> When she came in like starlight, hid with jewels.

Puzzling, I mean, if you assume that Jonson despised his characters for feeling this kind of enthusiasm. I think he felt it himself very readily. The phrase here is easily turned into contempt, because only a very ugly woman could need to be totally hidden behind her jewellery; but the poet writes with the genuine bated breath of the crowd standing outside to watch the great ladies make their entries. Lollia achieved mention for her splendour during the days of Augustus; and Jonson, it seems to me, like a number of earlier Renaissance scholars, admired Imperial Rome in a way which we now find remote. He thought that modern science was just beginning to get us back to that Paradise, that magnificent technology which had somehow got lost in the Dark Ages; he is helping to recover our birthright when he imagines

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unheard of luxuries. (This assumption that he too was complaining against science for being irreligious is therefore peculiarly absurd.) Indeed, the whole story of Volpone is in a way a compliment to seventeenth-century Venice, because it was recognisably borrowed from Imperial Rome.

Whether attractive or not, the wooing fails because of the simple piety of the girl, who had already accepted misery when her father sold her to a rich cripple. With needling pathos, Celia makes any offer she can think of to Volpone if only he will spare her virtue, and of course she will then also "report him virtuous." This has an electric effect, because, as the audience is expected to realise, he has been operating all along from a peculiar code of honour:

> VOL. Think me cold
> Frozen, and impotent, and so report me?

Such is the threat which forces him to lay hands upon her, and the virtuous young man at once bounds out of hiding to interrupt him. Since this young man has also learned a more important secret, that Volpone is not dying and only pretends it to win legacies, Volpone is next found bemoaning to Mosca the prospect of "beggary and infamy." But surely it was not a reputation for sexual potency which he has been building up for the last three years by pretending to be at death's door? The audience liked hearing about absurd points of honour, and here they are given a specially absurd one; then Volpone and Mosca go into a childish huddle for comfort, confessing and making excuses to one another. It amounts to a fairly elaborate protection for Volpone, to prevent the audience from swinging against him.

Mosca seems an undeveloped character, but this is not a fault of the author, nor yet an illustration of a profound theory that all characters ought to be undeveloped. One might indeed complain that one or two of Mosca's comments are too magnificent to belong to him:

> Bountiful bones! What horrid strange offence
> Did he commit 'gainst nature, in his youth,
> Worthy this age?

(that is, making him deserve to become this horrible old man);

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but such rhetoric can be viewed as simply imitated from his master, for whose feelings he has a real sympathy; also, it helps to keep up a uniformity of tone. Apart from that, the plot requires Mosca to be a conventional-minded parasite, actually *trying* to be a "typical" one, because this is what causes his downfall. At the start of Act III, the correct point for the "crisis" of the design, he tells us what a clever parasite he is, and we find at once that he has overplayed his hand. He planted the good young man as a witness to something else, but events move too fast, and now the witness knows that Volpone is not dying. Disaster is only averted by the splendid impudence of Mosca at the trial, aided by the contemptible behaviour of the misers; but the nerve of Volpone is shaken by having to appear in court, and this causes his fatal error, which begins Act V. After being carried home, he looks round for a yet more reckless action, to recover his nerve:

> 'Fore God, my left leg 'gan to have the cramp,
> And I apprehended straight some power had struck me
> With a dead palsy. Well, I must be merry

—or fear will give him a disease; so he drinks, and as usual on the stage the effect is immediate:

> Tis almost gone, already; I shall conquer.
> Any device now, of a rare ingenious knavery
> That would possess me with a violent laughter
> Would make me up again.

That is, not only his chief pleasure, but his basic confidence, his assurance that his view of the scene around him is correct, comes from being able to fool in a spectacular manner these great world bankers, so as to prove that he completely understands their folly. It is plain here that Jonson was not still operating on the crude theory about "humours" which he had used earlier while struggling and frustrated. Unless you accept Volpone as an unusual character, almost as complicated as those of Shakespeare which the same audience enjoyed, the story is merely incredible. Be this as it may, after Volpone and Mosca have boasted together a little, tenderly though Mosca rallies him a bit to calm his fears, he signs a will leaving Mosca his entire fortune and tells Mosca to

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announce that he is dead. It is done with no expectation of further gain, merely to torment the expectant misers and induce them to act still more absurdly. Mosca comes to feel uneasy about this, after dismissing three misers with insults one after another, while he works away at his accounts and Volpone (like the author as usual) peers delightedly from the wings; Mosca suspects that they may feel too insulted to continue the arrangement after the truth becomes known; but Volpone feels certain that they will swallow any insult to get his fortune.

As it happens, then, what destroys Volpone is a superstitious fear, while on trial in court, that he has been genuinely made a cripple by "some power", the guardian angel of the State of Venice presumably. This would recall to early audiences the corresponding movement in the mind of Macbeth, whose throat had become so dry while murdering Duncan that he found he could not say "Amen" when the guard said "God bless us." But why couldn't he? he asks his wife with his unnerving self-pity, while it is obvious that he was lucky to be unable to betray his presence. I think that Jonson copied this detail from Shakespeare's play, which had only just been brought out, merely because he considered it true to life—another bit of evidence that *Macbeth* was written before *King Lear*. But the dating does not affect the present argument; I only say that, as the mind of Volpone was so close to the mind of Macbeth, at a crucial point which would be recognised by the Globe audiences, they cannot have regarded him simply as a Humour.

After the third miser has been sent away with a flea in his ear, Volpone bounds out of hiding and takes the final step which ensures disaster:

> VOL. Bid him eat lettuce well. My witty mischief,
> Let me embrace thee. O that I could now
> Transform thee to a Venus!—Mosca, go
> Straight take my habit of clarissimo
> And walk the streets; be seen, torment them more;
> We must pursue, as well as plot. Who would
> Have lost this feast?

The difficult rhythm of the last sentence, addressed directly to the audience, is best treated as a vast sigh of content.

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VOL. That I could but now think of some disguise
To meet 'em in, and ask 'em questions;
How I would vex 'em still at every turn!
MOS. Sir, I can fit you.
VOL. Canst thou?
MOS. Yes. I know
One of the commandatori, sir, so like you.
Him will I straight make drunk, and bring you his habit

Thus Volpone will be outside, disguised as a humble policeman, with his servants assured that he is dead and taking orders from his accredited heir. He might induce them to recognise him, but this would be at the cost of admitting that he was not at the point of death, which would lose him the three legacies. He is handing Mosca the ideal situation to betray him (exposing a servant to temptation, as my mother used to say). Indeed, Mosca might claim later to have only protected Volpone's interests by refusing to recognise him. But Mosca seems to look at him as a chess-player might do at an opponent who is sacrificing his queen: "Did you really mean to do that? Well, I must take the obvious advantage, whatever you have in mind"; so he captures the queen. At first he only demands half, but when Volpone rejects this with indignation he becomes absorbed in the fun of trickery and conflict—he has no idea that he is breaking Volpone's heart, or at least exasperating the pride which in a Venetian grandee is even more dangerous. In the final trial, he orders Volpone the supposed policeman to be whipped for insolence to himself, now in Volpone's place; perhaps he feels that the extravagance of the presumption makes him safe, because no one could suspect he is doing it. Jonson is careful not to let the farce become weepy at the climax, and Volpone merely asks the audience to agree with him that "if I confess, it cannot be much worse"; but it is, and the real reason why he chooses to confess is that he has nothing left to live for, and would prefer to be wronged under his own high name. As he abandons his disguise Mosca gives a last whimpering cry of "Why, patron!"; he had not believed that anything could make the father-figure turn against him. The court of Venice is shown as grossly venal, and naturally outraged by flippancy about wills; it orders Volpone to be crippled by irons till he is as decrepit as

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he has pretended to be. He is led out with the grim stoical last line, faintly reminiscent of Iago, "This is called mortifying of a fox." It sounds as if some practical operation was called that, but I do not know what.

It has been argued that the play is the Tragedy of Volpone, and this question largely turns on whether you decide that Mosca has broken his heart. A lady student pointed out to me that Mosca, when Volpone tells him to invent an excuse for not showing his supposed corpse, answers stoutly: "I'll say it stunk, sir." Considering what the pretence has been, this is the correct excuse, and Mosca evidently enjoys his work on the whole; but an actor could fairly present him as getting tired of being hugged and kissed all the time. Jonson himself might tell the actor to do it, since his feelings on the subject were mixed. As one often finds with manly men, who need pleasure with coarse vigorous women (and resent the pretentions of ladies), he was very susceptible to elegant courageous lads, and inclined to denounce sodomy in other people so as to cover this up. But the English audience expected sodomy in raffish Italians, and Jonson does not treat the mattter as at all crucial. Another conviction of the first audience would be more decisive for the motivation: that the rulers of Venice are immensely proud aristocrats, though of course all "in trade." Jonson was no good at presenting aristocratic dignity, any more than romantic love, and preferred to take the mickey out of them, but he could rely on his audience to presume that Volpone, though a rebel, kept his class pride; and as this supplies his motive a modern producer should put it back. Telling the audience that Mosca is no use for pleasure ("O that I could . . .") cannot be intended to forestall scandal because it is delayed till the last Act—it comes just before their feelings for one another become decisive. I think its function is to make clear that this love is of a comparatively dignified kind, the love of a criminal for his accomplice to whom he boasts, nobly undemanding in any other way; but it is still doomed, especially in a man with a code of pride.

You may have noticed that my last paragraph set out to shoo away the feeling of tragedy but ended by yielding to it. I have next to recall the real end of the play. Some of my readers can perhaps remember (long, long ago) seeing *Peter Pan*, in which Tinker Bell, though dying of poison, will recover if the audience

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believes in fairies—"clap if you do." Tired of sitting still, the children save the life of Tinker Bell every time. This device had presumably been learned from the end of the *Beggar's Opera,* which also allows the audience to give a reprieve. In *Peter Pan* they are only asked to confess a habit of daydreaming, I think; but in the *Beggar's Opera* the first audiences were asked to confess that they were half on the side of the rebels, they half agreed that they ought to overthrow the Government of Walpole. It was a display of careless ease, but the call for applause was bound to have a certain fighting political point. This in turn had been taken from *Volpone,* one of the few Jacobean plays which were still revived; and there, I think, in its rough prejudiced way, the device amounted to a vote for English law against Continental law. The English had long been proud that their legal procedure did not admit torture (Shakespeare uses the belief, with the vagueness that was needed, at 2 *Henry VI,* III.i.120); and indeed Volpone could hardly even be detained under English law, except for masquerading as a policeman. You are not asked to believe that Volpone is a good character, but that the wicked laws of Venice inherently produce characters like him—and like Shylock, for that matter. No English audience would want to cripple Volpone, as the Venetian bench did, for making Venice ridiculous; they can be trusted to let him off, thus dispelling the clouds of tragedy which have gathered over the last Act, from the intensity of the reactions of these odd characters. Jonson invented the device, likely enough, just to preserve decorum; to make the farce end like a farce though it had become so gripping. All the same, the pardon of Volpone is given the dignity of political language, and some members of the first audience would be likely to take it seriously. Our Moralizing school, on the other hand, cannot face the actual end of the play; such critics hardly ever admit its existence:

> . . . though the Fox be punished by the laws,
> He yet doth hope, there is no suffering due
> For any fault which he hath done 'gainst you.
> If there be, censure him; here he doubtful stands.
> If not, fare jovially, and clap your hands.

Better results really might be expected, morally as well as aesthetically, if they would fare more jovially.

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RONALD PERRY

Scrollpainting

Hard as anyone's hands, soft as their least touch,
The landscape behind this hand-high delicate beast
Grows slowly out of the silence. Beyond,
Black iron and moss where the hills ride up;
Nearer, pale sun and paler moon
Together trapped in twigs in the snowy woods
As the mandarin's scroll continues to unroll,
Shedding its dead or still dying pages. Cleftfoot
Warily poised at the very edge of the wood,
Suspicious of so much softness: anyone can tell
He is but newly come down from the mountains.
If he stays, he will learn. Here, spring
Will be sudden, and the thunder announcing rain
Will speak with a new voice, not the iron
Bellnote he remembers. If he stays he will learn
To read the grave's green histories in the back-
Broken sad palms of the palms and palmetto
Shoots as they spring out of the tame fields
And frozen paddies: so that his horns also,
As tortured as a tree, push up with the vines
Ruddy with sunstroke; break
Into leaf; blossom. But look where now the fine
Neck arches and the light leaps under the iron
Branches as the scroll unrolls to the end
And he stands still with his head
High, and listens. Listen. It is not a voice
Many would care to remember, but for him
It's halfway home. It is the voice of the wind
Off the mountain, from which he is so newly
Come down—but for one hour only,
And impelled by but the one desire: to leave
Hoofprints in the blazing snow outside
For the mandarin to marvel at when he
Rolls up his scroll at last and walks stiffly
Out of his house, into the world, in the morning.

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Voices

after the Indonesian of Chairil Anwar

For those of us who lie
Between Krawang and Bekasi
Never again will there be
Any shouts of
Freedom! Merdeka!
Before taking aim again.
For us, it is finished.

But if we return in the small hours
Between midnight and morning
Surely someone will hear us?
Surely someone will listen
To his heart's-blood coursing
And hear, not his own,
But our hearts still beating?

We will speak to you in the small hours
Between midnight and morning
When the clock talks to itself on the wall
And you lie awake listening
And listening to the silence
Thinking about nothing.

We were very lucky.
We died young.
We left nothing
But dust, dust
And scattered bones.
We were very lucky.
For us, it is finished.

And yet, it is not finished.
It is never finished.
If you wish to remember us, remember

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We gave what we could afford
And it was not enough.
We gave all that we had
And it was not enough.
And then we gave ourselves
And others, many others
Into death's safekeeping
And still it was not enough.

Even as we lie here
Hundreds, thousands, millions
Still walk about
Going nowhere
Thinking about nothing
Listening to the silence and hearing
The empty echo where the heart was.

We were lucky.
We died young.
We left nothing
But dust, dust
And scattered bones.

And now even these
Do not belong to us.
The bones are yours now.
You will have to decide
What to do with them.
You will have to decide

Whether we died
For Freedom, Victory and the Future
Or for nothing.
We do not know.
We cannot tell you.
The dust has got our tongues.
You will have to speak for us:

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We were the lucky ones.
We died young.
We left nothing
But dust, dust
And scattered bones
All the way from
Krawang to Bekasi.

Translations from the Lao

THE SONG OF NHÔMPHIBÀNE

Body, you have lost your lodger
Now you are less than nothing
Windows blind, rooms empty
Now you can only be
A useless thing of this earth only
Like the trunk of a dead tree

Lodger, you have left your body
Now for a time you are free
Heart-whole, eyes wide open
Now for a time you can see
Yourself unadorned and in glory
Like the green heart of a tree

THE CALL OF THE SOUL

Come swiftly, soul
By forgotten footpath
And unswept track
Out of trackless
Wild or salt waste
Return to us

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Do not delay on the road
Nor hesitate overlong
In the cobra's nest
Or the tiger's thicket

Do not let riverflood
Dissuade you nor
Any other voice
Persuade you but

Come swiftly back
To these well-wrought
Timbers hooked eaves
Open eyes and mouth
Of your own house

INVOCATION: SOUKHOUAN

Sakké, Kamé
    Twin climbers of the paradise stair
    From whom light springs
    Even in the midst of darkness
Charoupé, Attārikhé
    Cloud-sailors, sky-walkers
    Who through our midnights float
    As swimmers in clear air
Khirisi Indweller
    In whom we have our home
    From whom will come again
    Speech after long silence
You, and also you
    Who are still nameless
    Gods of mountain, field and river
    We pray you look not too ill
    On us who stumble to your altars
    But lend your ears to our beseeching

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JOHN PECK

The Watcher

On the far edge of a plain,
As on white flats of Kirghiz,
A muzzy grey edge of men.

It moves in my direction
Through wind that sings.
An old anxiety
Relaxes, and I wait.

White-booted and white-coated
They approach over snow
That caves beneath them.
Their legs lift and plunge.

I am not seen as they near—
One speaks to another,
Confident, precise
Under white, fur-lugged headgear—
His language is alien
But I can see that he is
Confident, precise.
In my secrecy,
In my inaction,
I admire this.

Then with his trained eye
He turns, squinting above me
Into pines over my shoulder—
A flanking shaggéd wall
Over depths of forest.

His rifle goes up—
I follow its sighting
To a bird that perches, waxen
And with eye of dark berry.

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As before, the wind that sings.
As before, a calm
Unaccountable, a moment
That continues to fill.

I do not ask, will it end;
But am aware of sky
As of scud over harbors—
Sheeted and stretched above
The snow poised on that bough.

The Quiet

Bent to your legs, undressing them,
Your back bends the light with it,
Warmly down and along
The spine's rivulet.

Then flexes it out to less than sheen
With your rising, and is gathering
All to contours, with the open
Secrets of odor.

Later, when the night rain has laced
The air with earth, grass, and the mixed
Pungencies of stone, there sounds
A patter, relaxed.

Warm void on waking, benevolent
Silence of this room becoming
Tiring-house to gestures,
The day's turnings

Idly wrought to the pitch of amendment.
You turn away in sleep, animal
Languor, a waterfall's smooth head,
Or hopes quieted—

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It is hours until light arrives,
Lifts us out along some radius
From this hub, into the balanced
Exchange of lives.

Sleep, while off toward terminals a thrumming
Crosses gaps in the night wind—
The lean of whistles, not breaking,
And then, broken.

VINCENT STEWART

Love Moment

Three trees seem miles away
as we lie on the musk-green grass
and stare at the single sun,
which we cannot look at directly—
but we smell its dry odor
and feel it touching us everywhere.

And your hand casually
lies across the point
where my legs meet, not meaning to,
and your breath comes
in long gasps as we relive
the moment that was and is.

I rise to meet your hand
as your breast rises to mine,
and this is the second moment:
endured without words,
accomplished without movement:
love that forgets it is love.

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VICTOR BROMBERT

Valéry: The Dance of Words

PAUL VALÉRY'S PROSE WRITING is far bulkier than his poetry, but hardly inferior in quality. His own distinction does not hold. He liked to think that prose is to poetry what walking is to dancing. Valéry's prose often attains the elegant gratuitousness of the dance. Even though he occasionally overindulges in the delights of his intellectual choreography, his major prose texts would have secured his reputation. *Monsieur Teste,* the pages on Leonardo da Vinci, *Eupalinos* and some of the other "dialogues," the essay "Man and the Sea Shell," some lyric accounts of early impressions of the Mediterranean, thoughts on history and politics (in particular the prophetic "Crisis of the Mind"), reminiscences of Degas and Mallarmé, sharp though not always fair pieces of literary criticism, some pages on (or rather against) esthetics, superior aphorisms—all these place Valéry squarely in the tradition of the French *moraliste,* the philosophizing essayist, graceful, often pungent, attempting to communicate the subtlest and most involuted thought by means of a transparent prose. This transparence, much like the sea water through which the young Paul Valéry watched with fascination the undulating entrails discarded by fishermen, provides a limpid and crystal-like medium which allows one to stare at anything. That, in Valéry's context, is the secret of all art.

The stare, the glance, the observation, are all important with Valéry. He is interested in poetics, in the problems of art and of the artist (which he does not want to confuse), in the greatness and sickness of our civilization; but what captivates him are the gymnastics of his own conscious thought as it takes stock of itself, as it constructs itself, seeing and foreseeing what it becomes. "I rarely lose sight of myself," says Monsieur Teste. This statement might well appear as epigraph to Valéry's entire work. Yet there is nothing frivolous in this egocentrism. Nor did the fact that so many pieces were written for special occasions bring about a surrender to facility. The intellectual high priest of the Third

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Republic, often called upon to provide a text or address a group, could not always avoid platitudes and repetitions. But on the whole there is high tension in almost every effort. Valéry transformed every occasion into a challenge.

The seriousness and intensity of his prose writing emerges very early in his *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci* and in *Monsieur Teste*. This curious anti-fiction in which Valéry tried to write a "pure" novel, one in which the hero (Teste: head; testis: witness) is an *essential* creature, uninvolved and abstract, is closely related to the speculations on Leonardo. From the one all plot has been banned; the other is barren of any biographical detail. The philosophical novel and the theoretical essay both aim at ideal constructs. Refusing to take into account the pettiness and inadequacy of reality, they are concerned with man's ability to transmute contingency into rigor. Many years later, evoking the strict artistic demands of the painter Degas, Valéry stated that the sovereign act of the artist is the passage from arbitrariness to necessity. His best texts live up to this pronouncement.

What are the outstanding qualities of Valéry's prose? Not scope or power, to be sure. His range of subjects and themes is fairly limited. His strength, it seems to me, lies in the combination of flexibility (stylistically marked by digressions) and purpose. Precision with him is not only a matter of syntax and vocabulary, it extends to the powers of observation. Whether he is looking at a sea shell, observing a friend's gestures in a living room, recalling a clever repartee, the result is totally devoid of vagueness. Consider, for example, the description of Huysmans, with his enormous spherical skull, bristling silver hair, holding a cigarette in his fine feminine hands: "he inhaled deeply, swaying in his armchair, with his skinny thighs tightly crossed, a boot suspended in mid-air impatiently beating empty space." The realism of this anti-realist stems not merely from a felicity of expression; it is related to a constant attention to all life and movement. It is confirmed by Valéry's predilection for all forms of dialogue and by the underlying sensuality of his art.

Valéry's most meditative prose is loaded with poetry. He knew that to describe is not the same as to sing. When he juxtaposes the works of men and the inspirations of Mediterranean scenery, when he evokes the metaphorical resources of da Vinci, or com-

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pares the procedures of a surgical operation to the exorcizing ritual of a sect dedicated to the myth of Purity, his voice cannot possibly be classed as prosaic. Yet the song is subdued, and the object remains fixed before the eyes. In fact, part of Valéry's success as a prose-poet derives from the attentiveness and willful innocence with which he faces any phenomenon. "We are always refusing to listen to the simple soul within us," he writes in "Man and the Sea Shell." The simple soul (the French *ingénu* is better) is not ordinarily associated with Valéry's sophisticated and somewhat haughty spirit. Still it may be this allegiance to an external, physical reality that accounts for the inventiveness of his prose. At times, it is the sheer power of abstraction that carries the imagination. The image of the Greek geometers, "argonauts of the mind," who trusted in words to lead them "like far-seeing blind men" *("aveugles clairvoyants")* is extraordinary. But it is the reverse process, from the concrete to the abstract—or better still, to the poetic—that distinguishes Valéry's finest passages, and corresponds to the point of encounter between clarity and fantasy. There are moments when Valéry achieves surrealistic effects, as when he considers the Mouth and views it as a mysterious and vaguely frightening mythical cavern whose multiple functions (fountains, sound explosions, hidden traps, coughing tempests) are simultaneously epic and grotesque.

A revival of Valéry scholarship in recent years was due first to the publication of the *Cahiers,* then to the discovery of Valéry's classifications of his *Cahiers.* Judith Robinson's brilliant research and analyses (her Pléiade edition of extracts from the *Cahiers* is forthcoming), the "Entretiens sur Paul Valéry" which took place in September 1965 under the direction of Emilie Noulet-Carner, Jean Hytier's two volume edition of the *Oeuvres* in the Pléiade collection, all testify to this recrudescence of interest. American scholarship has so far, surprisingly, neglected him, even though T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens were among his admirers, and a few doctoral dissertations have been devoted to him. Yet Valéry's work, and his prose in particular, remains fresh and timely—and occasionally even proves to be prophetic, as when he discusses the crisis of the Western mind.

There is much here that corresponds to our own tastes and concerns. Valéry was more fascinated by work in progress than by

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the finished product; he preferred the problematical and speculative nature of the sketch to the arrested tableau. The drama of creation seemed to him the supreme value. As for the lessons of history, he was a heretic, and one of the first to diagnose the potential dangers of a relativistic perspective which arrogantly claims to be a science, and in the process justifies and sanctifies all that happens. Valéry was willing to grant history the status of a literary genre ("I see no difference between reading a novel and reading a volume of history . . ."), except that he felt that history was a literary genre ashamed of being what it is. Many of the Existentialist and post-Existentialist attacks on humanistic optimism and the historical spirit are consonant with Valéry's repeated denunciations of the hoaxes and frivolities of an education that stresses the historical and the biographical approach.

Yet Valéry was not an enemy of Humanism. Quite the contrary, he was a devoted panegyrist of the spirit of Europe, and depressed by the thought of its possible decline. In inspired pages, he proclaimed the greatness of the European achievement, attempted to define it, consoled himself with the thought that America (discovered and made by Europeans) would perpetuate the best of Europe's heritage and genius. Three conditions appeared to him indispensable elements in the formation of the European spirit: the civic sense of Rome; the introspective tendencies of Christianity; the speculative mind of Greece as represented by its geometers and architects, lovers of form and of pure science. The latter especially accounts for the European psyche, according to Valéry: the steady yearning for discoveries, the search for what is not, the disinterested curiosity and unusual blend of imagination and disciplined thinking, the unresigned mysticism. Geometry has provided the challenge to make common speech serve the needs of precise reasoning. An incorruptible model, Greek geometry represents for him the perfect expression of the European talent for adapting will to the exigencies of the dream. For Europe, in Valéry's terms, is primarily a great realizer of dreams.

It is understandable that in the important essay "The Crisis of the Mind" (1919), he should have expressed his anguish over what he considered, in the wake of World War I, the "death agony of the European soul." All civilizations are mortal, but Valéry is not concerned with all civilizations. What worries him is the likely

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decline of Europe. Science has ceased being an end in itself, an artistic activity; it has been placed in the service of commerce, power and domination—hence transformed into an instrument that, sooner or later, will be adopted by everybody and turned against its inventor. All around him Valéry sees disturbing signs: the proliferation of information, the cacophony of ideas, the disease of encyclopedism, the inability of knowledge to save anything. "Modernity" is distinguished by chaos, by the jarring juxtaposition of unassimilable elements. Europe has become a Hamlet haunted by ghosts, rebelling against the past by a dizzying cult of newness for newness' sake. The finest assets, the highest virtues, are being sapped.

Replace the adjective "European" with "Western," and Valéry's diagnosis of fifty years ago appears prophetic. These ills have grown worse. It is interesting that even Valéry's suspicion of history, his debunking of biography and of fiction, should be so much in tune with contemporary attitudes. The fact is that all these are related. Valéry's "structuralism"—for it is almost necessary to use this term in dealing with the twentieth-century writer who, more than any other, was interested in the functioning rather than the function—takes on metaphoric and even mythical dimensions. The image of the tree (one of Valéry's most interesting texts is the *Dialogue de l'Arbre*) casts light on his fundamental attitudes. Pierre Laurette has devoted an entire study to this theme (*Le Thème de l'Arbre chez Paul Valéry*, Paris, 1967). Structuralist assumptions and approaches can be detected throughout his prose works. Rejecting the myth of depth in psychology as well as in literature (*"Le fond n'a aucune importance . . . essentielle,"*) he considered form the supreme value and was inclined to think of the writer as the fabricator of a "language machine." His approach to dreams was totally un-Freudian, and even anti-Freudian. Judith Robinson (*French Studies*, April 1962) has analyzed the remarks Valéry devoted to this subject in the *Cahiers*, where he stressed the structure rather than the content of dreams, as well as the absence of the all-important and all-creating rift which consciousness introduces. For Valéry, the main difference between dreaming and full consciousness is that the dreamer always gets lost in his own self (*"Le rêveur s'égare en lui-même"*), whereas the lucidity of the waking state foresees and precedes the self, and

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consequently creates. For the creator is made by his creation. That is why the biographical approach seems such an aberration to Valéry. When he writes about Leonardo da Vinci he strives to create a *model,* to reconstruct a theoretical creator by means of his creation. Thus Eupalinos, the architect, also knows that to build temples is to construct the self ("I move forward in my own edification . . ."). If it is functioning and not the function (or the cause) that interests Valéry, it is because his perspective remains essentially that of the *faber.* Structuralism here merges with poetry. The tree seems admirable to Valéry because it glorifies the principle of structure. But Valéry also views the poet as a "tree of words."

The past decade has brought good news to English-speaking lovers of Valéry. Individual volumes of the Collected Works in English translation have been appearing since 1956—a monumental undertaking of the Bollingen Series, under the general editorship of Jackson Mathews.[1] This admirably conceived and executed enterprise is noteworthy for the taste and elegance of its presentation, the excellence of the groupings, the fine notes which clarify allusions and references, the challenging introductions by distinguished critics and poets, the inclusion of hitherto uncollected items, and above all the superior skill of the translators. All in all, this promises to be a landmark. So far, eight volumes have appeared, out of a planned total of fifteen. Some of Valéry's most important texts are not yet available: *Monsieur Teste, Leonardo,* and of course the *Poems.* What has appeared so far is, however, clear evidence of the highest standards and should give readers not yet acquainted with Valéry a most authoritative contact with his prose.

The first volume, *Dialogues,* appeared in 1956, with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens. Excellently translated by William McCausland Stewart, who knew Valéry personally and discussed difficult

[1] THE COLLECTED WORKS OF PAUL VALÉRY, edited by *Jackson Mathews.* Bollingen Series XLV. Pantheon Books and Princeton University Press. (Eight volumes have appeared so far: *Plays,* tr. by David Paul and Robert Fitzgerald, $6.50; *Dialogues,* tr. by William McCausland Stewart, $4.50; *Idée Fixe,* tr. by David Paul, $4.50; *The Art of Poetry,* tr. by Denise Folliot, $6.50; *History and Politics,* tr. by Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews, $7.50; *Degas, Manet, Morisot,* tr. by David Paul, $5.00; *Aesthetics,* tr. by Ralph Manheim, $6.00; *Masters and Friends,* tr. by Martin Turnell, $6.50.)

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points of *Eupalinos* with him, these "dialogues" are among the poet's most significant prose writings. "Man was made for conversation," says a character in one of Valéry's verbal encounters. The gift and the need for dialectical exercises appears at every point in texts such as *Socrates and His Physician* (Valéry was fascinated by the medical profession, by what it knew about man that man could not know about himself), *Dance and the Soul, Dialogue of the Tree*—not to mention the famous *Eupalinos, or The Architect.* In his prefatory remarks, Wallace Stevens makes some important points about Valéry's love of rigor, his partiality to architecture, and the apotheosis of esthetics implicit everywhere.

Next, under the heading *The Art of Poetry* (1958) and translated by Denise Folliot, appeared a number of texts that raise problems of poetic practice in his own poetry or that of other poets. Even when Valéry discusses the achievement of a La Fontaine he is still talking about himself and the difficulties of his art. The essay on *Adonis,* for instance, is a defense of poetic constraints, a justification of arbitrary rules. The "exquisite constraints" (*"gênes exquises"*) are the corollary to the hard fact that little that is great has ever been the fruit of sheer talent or so-called inspiration. Valéry stresses the independence of the artistic construct, as well as the importance of the reader's response. This is a text to which the Anglo-Saxon "new critics" might well have subscribed. It is fitting that this volume was prefaced by T. S. Eliot—a most interesting introduction which, after a banal, self-centered and slow beginning, turns into a good piece of criticism. While approving some of Valéry's notions (the priority of labor over dreams, the glorification of the *stillness* of painting and sculpture, the concept of the poet as a patient worker in a laboratory) and admiring the subtleties of a thought "which moves like a trained dancer," Eliot comes up with some serious reservations. The distinction Valéry establishes between prose and poetry does not seem sound to him; he complains of some "eyewash" in his pronouncements; he comments on the limitations of his interests and his readings, on his Narcissism, on what he defines as the frigidity of a "spiritual celibate." It is not at all sure that Eliot was willing or able to attune himself to Valéry's special brand of mystical scepticism.

In 1960, the volume *Degas-Manet-Morisot* came out, containing the delightful uncollected item "A Recollection of Renoir." I

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must confess that I find the introduction by Douglas Cooper a trifle verbose and not always clearly focussed. He too cannot quite make up his mind about Valéry. Although he ultimately praises the "mysterious unity" which holds these essays together, he underlines the fact that Valéry knew that he was not qualified for art criticism, that he considered art and artists like "so many pegs on which he could hang ideas," that the result is urbane table talk. At best Valéry's reactions were too cerebral; at worst he was insensitive to Impressionism, not interested in contemporary painters, unconcerned with the finished object. But certainly there is much more to Valéry's writings on art. Not only are some of these pages pungent and moving (the recollections of Degas for instance, the pathos of his old age)—but his observations on the nude, on the problems of the artist, on the criterion of difficulty, on landscape in painting and in literature, on the intoxications of modernity, are far from superficial, although the language is brisk and often aphoristic. It is hard not to be self-conscious writing on art after Diderot, Stendhal and Baudelaire.

The *Plays,* which were also published in the Bollingen series in 1960, are among the most disappointing efforts of Valéry. Not that he lacked the gift of repartee and wit. He had almost too much; and *My Faust,* a late work, is surprisingly alert. But there is something brittle in these theatrical efforts. As Francis Fergusson points out in his introduction, Valéry is too self-conscious an artist, and the desire to have as little as possible to do with the human situation is not conducive to good theater. The self-conscious play has of course become fashionable, and *My Faust* reads at times like a metaphysical farce. But this cerebral comedy is self-centered and even didactic. When Faust says: "TO SEE is enough, and to know that one sees. . . ," when he suggests that all creation is a game, that history has nothing to teach us, when Mephisto describes Faust's head as "packed with contradictions," "supernaturally lucid," and "ultra-delirious" at the same time, it sounds very much like an exposé of personal attitudes and private concerns. The volume, with translations by David Paul (who also translated *Degas-Manet-Morisot)* and Robert Fitzgerald, contains some very interesting information on the various readings and performances of these texts, as well as an excellent list of allusions in *My Faust.* In addition, there are some lively recollections by Igor Stravinsky (they had common friends and a real esteem for one

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another) who, quite shrewdly, refers to the "religious" nature of the non-religious Valéry. In fact, these few pages by Stravinsky are studded with perceptive remarks.

Valéry's political, and more broadly speaking "cultural" writings have been grouped in the volume entitled *History and Politics* (1962), containing about 70 items, some of them major essays such as "The Crisis of the Mind," "Remarks on Intelligence," and "Politics of the Mind." The groupings are excellent; no single French edition has ever attempted to put together these politico-cultural texts. The subject index is also very useful. Given the nature of this volume, one finds some repetitions. One also finds some hardly known texts, such as the little piece on Switzerland, as well as extracts from letters to Gide and to André Lebey, and a letter by Salvador de Madariaga who also quite fittingly wrote the introduction to this volume. As Spanish representative to the League of Nations in Geneva, he had come to know Valéry quite well when he served on the Committee on Arts and Letters. Madariaga, who quickly recognized the aristocratic intelligence of Valéry (his haughtiness too), sees him as a mystic of the intellect, appreciates his faith in Europe (he calls him one of the founding fathers of a United Europe), but cannot hide his disappointment at the general weakness of Valéry's political writing. This weakness (lack of sympathy for ordinary humanity, respect for authority and tradition, fear of insecurity, a certain chauvinism) is discussed with engaging candor in a preface by Valéry's younger son Paul, who humorously recalls how his father once defined himself at the dinner table as a "government anarchist." The fact is that Valéry, who signed an anti-Dreyfus manifesto, was on the side of the Nationalists during that crisis. Without being what one might call a Rightist, he had a perhaps exaggerated respect for established social values. But it is unfair to judge, at the end of the 1960's, a man whose political horizon had been determined by the cultural climate of the turn of the century.

The last three volumes to appear so far in the impressive Bollingen edition are *Aesthetics* (1964), with an introduction by Herbert Read, and containing two early book reviews (translations by Ralph Manheim); *Idée Fixe* (1965) with an introduction by Philip Wheelwright and a preface by Jackson Mathews (translation by David Paul); and *Masters and Friends* (1968) with an introduction by Joseph Frank (translation by Martin Turnell)

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—the latter being a collection of Valéry's literary criticism, ranging from Pontus de Tyard to Rilke and Proust. Herbert Read quite rightly stresses Valéry's belief in an intellectual mode of sensibility, his interest in the *drama* of creation, his belief in the bond between form and material. Valéry set little store by esthetics, though he considered its inadequacies and failures creative. Valéry loved even the defeats of intelligence. As for his literary criticism, it is most uneven, ranging from scintillating insights to digressive and even shallow appraisals. What is one to make of an "Homage to Marcel Proust" by one who in the opening paragraph plainly states that he has scarcely read a single volume of that author, who goes on to affirm that the novelist's art is almost inconceivable to him, and then comes up with the statement that *A la Recherche du temps perdu* is a work that can be opened wherever one chooses, that its vitality does not depend on what went before? Valéry's intention is obvious (and flattering to Proust): he wants to elevate this novelist to the dignity of poet. But this is hardly a useful approach to the art of fiction.

On Stendhal his judgments are more pertinent. In a brilliant essay, Valéry discusses Stendhal's intellectual games of sincerity, his search for his authentic self which condemns him to play a role in that very search, his calculated egotism and sly complicity with his reader. These are fine, though at times irritating pages; superior at any rate to the rather severe essay on Flaubert's *Tentation de saint Antoine,* whose primary merit is that it brings out with great sharpness a fundamental dilemma of Realism, namely the contradiction of a highly artistic style and a banal subject matter. In his introduction, Joseph Frank provides an excellent exposé of the heterogeneous elements that combined to form Valéry thought: the symbolist background, the rationalist reaction, Nietzschean tendencies, the conflict between his humanist sensibility and his conceptual commitments. Frank's ultimate judgment is not altogether favorable. He feels that, as a thinker, Valéry does not face the implications of his thought, that all too often he assumes a stance of infallibility, wishing simultaneously to be a "high priest of science" and a "humanistic prophet of doom."

I must confess to a special fondness for *Idée Fixe.* This dialogue (or duologue as the translator David Paul cleverly puts it) has been successfully staged in recent years. Read, heard or acted

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out—this text brings out the most appealing and most characteristic features of Valéry's prose art. Tense, nervous, sprightly, a bit precious, quite witty, repeatedly "poetic"—the tone, the verve, the acrobatic handling of ideas, the underlying tension and even anxiety, justify a comparison with Diderot at his best. Of course, the counterpoint of motifs and themes is specifically Valéryan: the struggle against the absurdity of passion, the cure of mobility, thinking as a form (or forms) of *modification*. The virtuoso repartees of the Doctor and the Poet, the irregularity of the rocks, the soothing presence of the sea—all contribute to create a mental atmosphere in which cleverness and sadness, sharp reaction and mellow remarks, love for precise language and for the caprice of ideas, become fused in a harmonious and self-revealing manner. The title is ironic, for by definition there can be no "fixed" ideas. The life of the mind, explains one of the protagonists, is total disorder and incoherence. Permanence is the unattainable value *("La durée est hors de prix.")* But is not that *durée,* that fixity and stillness, what Valéry the poet aims at? The double attraction of fluidity and unalterable form is at the heart of Valéry's work. It explains why he was so taken with the art of the dance.

Valéry knew that contradictions could be fecund. He was also haunted by the notion that there existed monsters of intelligence and self-awareness. Hence some rather complex attitudes on the subject of genius and originality: on the one hand, the idea that the creation is more important than the creator, that the creator, a Robinson Crusoe of the intellect, discovers himself through what he does, that his function is to make others create; on the other, that the artist is a Godless mystic endowed with a quasi-mythical status, that he is engaged in a superior *game* that requires unusual cerebral powers for exploiting every inspiration and mastering every happy chance. His ideal is that of the whole man, the *"homme complet"* of the Renaissance, the anti-specialist (the supreme model being Leonardo) whose *consciousness* plays chess with his *being,* whose lucid thought struggles with his inadequacies. *"Rigueur obstinée"* becomes the supreme value.

Originality, like inspiration, takes on a suspicious quality in this perspective. Given Valéry's stress on the gymnastics of the *possible,* his notion that fixity of thought is no thought, it would

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seem to follow that the function and the aim of the mind are change and transformation. Intellect orders, but it must also create disorder and disrupt slumber. Instability and newness thus appear necessary to the artist's achievement. In the essay on Degas, Valéry explains that the demon of *change for its own sake* is a begetter of many things. But of what? Of beauty and truth? At times. But more often, of absurdity and platitude.

Originality therefore comes to be linked with false values, sensationalism and intoxication—in other words with the enemies of translucence. Originality, Valéry quipped, is a matter of good digestion. Everything feeds on something else. Hence there are, strictly speaking, no original writers, though there are many who pretend to be. But playing that role is misleading and dangerous. Romanticism and the spiritual crisis of modern Europe have much to do with this disease of innovation. The European Hamlet, staring at millions of ghosts and at the hopeless proliferation of notions, feels depressed both by the boredom of rehearsing the past and by the utter folly of always seeking to innovate. Valéry's Mephisto derives a properly devilish pleasure from throwing together the souls of so-called great men and women, thereby denying the very concept of uniqueness.

Valéry seems to waver between the belief that only transformation counts, and the attachment to that which has already been achieved. Taste for speculation and a curator's love for a given heritage appear to contradict each other. In fact, in his prose writings, Valéry seeks—and it seems to me achieves—a precious, though precarious balance. He himself, speaking of the mind's activity in "Politics of the Mind," describes the widening gap between its two aspects, the one of transformation and the other of preservation. Order, balance, and harmony are perhaps in the last analysis what he prizes most—more no doubt than motion and unpredictability. And the precariousness of any order, its tenuous quality, have their stylistic equivalent in what T. S. Eliot calls the "fine logodeal web" of the mind on which Valéry moves like a trained dancer. We return to the dance, which next to architecture, is probably the key Valéry image. Valéry thought of poetry as a dance of words. His prose dances too. This is perhaps why, contrary to his intellectual hero Monsieur Teste, he rarely went to the far end of his own thought.

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

The New Boston: Government Center

BOSTON'S ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER is lack of character. This is not to say that there are not individual buildings and neighborhoods with pronounced character, or that there do not exist streets and entire districts with such character, but that Boston, unlike New York or Washington, leaves no overall architectural impression on the mind. Despite such early developments as Louisburg Square and such later ones as Back Bay and the Prudential Center, the city as a whole is typified by the chaotic heterogeneity of the North End and State Street areas, where buildings of every style, size, and vintage are crowded together along narrow and irregular streets, described as early as 1665 as "crooked, with little decency and no uniformity." The insufficiency of these streets to meet today's traffic and pedestrian demands is often noted and lamented, but they stand as living proof of Boston's ability to maintain its random character in the face of changing architectural fashion, as the entire city evidences Boston's power to transform attempts at the creation of classical order into added constituents of its fluid vitality.

The area of Boston extending from Bulfinch's State House to the waterfront includes that of the original settlement of the city in 1630, and its streets were laid out according to the exigencies of a no longer extant topography. In their apparent randomness and conformity to geographical configuration, those streets and the buildings that lined them (the remaining old buildings are considerably later—the earliest dating from the 18th century) were true examples of English medieval survival planning and architecture. For two centuries after its foundation the city continued to grow along much the same lines, responding to concrete problems and demands, and even today the downtown area retains the variety of architectural style, materials, and scale that must have characterized it from the beginning. In a very real sense the Renaissance did not come to Boston until the creation of the residential Back Bay area, with its broad and regular avenues, in the last half of the 19th century. By that time, the site of 17th century Boston, greatly expanded by landfill along the harbor and the Charles River, was given over entirely to financial, commercial, and governmental functions, and parts of it had already begun the decline that was to culminate in the honky-tonk of Scollay Square by the middle of this century. It was this run-down area that was chosen for Boston's new Government Center, and little as one might regret

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its passing, even it was graced with a pedigree, being hard by the area that was known as early as the 17th century as Mount Whoredom.

As early as the 1930's there had been proposals for a new City Hall and for the renewal of the area adjacent to the existing building. By the early fifties these two ideas had been amalgamated and a Government Center on the site of Scollay Square was proposed, but it was not until John Collins became mayor of Boston in 1960 that action was taken. Collins immediately invited Edward Logue, then working in New Haven, to become Development Administrator of the city, and together they conceived a vast renewal project for Boston to be executed under the supervision of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, which has since done an outstanding job of originating and implementing development proposals. Government Center was to be not only the largest single element in Boston's redevelopment but its symbolic core. As such, it had first priority. By the end of the year I. M. Pei had been engaged to study the area. His report, submitted in 1961, envisioned a larger site than had originally been thought of, and soon acquisition of the present sixty acre area began. Pei was entrusted with the overall planning, street layout, and building placement, while the actual design of the major buildings was assigned to separate architects and that of the new City Hall was the subject of a competition.

It is doubtful whether a more appropriate planner than Pei could have been found, for he had attended M.I.T. and was thoroughly familiar with Boston and its general character. He studied the Scollay Square section carefully, walking over it with Walter Whitehill of the Boston Atheneum to make sure there were no buildings of whose historic or esthetic significance he was unaware. His final recommendation was to raze the area almost entirely, a renewal approach more common then than now and one that has recently come in for serious criticism, but one that seemed entirely appropriate for a site that contained not one building judged to be worth saving. A few, indeed, were saved, notably Sears Crescent, which attracted attention more for its size, shape and general importance than for its indifferent architecture. A public effort was made to preserve the Old Howard Theatre, as much for historic and associational as for architectural reasons, but this was finally deemed to be unfeasible. Having decided on the removal of the existing buildings and the obliteration of the street pattern, Pei was faced with laying out a development that would work with the surrounding areas. Already seriously damaged on the northeast by the construction of an elevated highway dividing the market and residential North End from the renewal area, the periphery of Government Center touched on an area of warehouses, Bulfinch's Harrison Gray Otis house and the adjacent West Church of Asher Benjamin, both red brick buildings built about 1800, the handsome gray stone Suffolk County Courthouse, a 19th century building remotely French

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in feeling, and the various banks and office buildings of State Street. All of these had to be considered in providing for major arteries for the heavy flow of traffic through the area and allowing for the great size and scale necessary for modern office buildings. Whether Pei's plan will be completely successful remains to be seen when all the buildings and streets of the Center are finished, but that he has done a remarkable job must be obvious to anyone who walks around the Center even in its present unfinished state.

The overall shape of the Government Center Redevelopment area is roughly that of a quarter circle which, were it completed, would occupy the northeast segment of a compass rose. At its westernmost point it abuts a residential and commercial area close to the complex of buildings constituting Massachusetts General Hospital. Its southernmost side runs along the Court Street—State Street commercial and financial area. Linking these two ends of the arc are two new curving streets. The shorter of the two is an extension of Cambridge Street that follows the contour of the foot of Beacon Hill and links two major arteries, Cambridge Street and Tremont Street. Paralleling it along the north and east are Merrimac and New Congress Streets, essentially one street that changes its name as it passes under the vast Municipal Parking Garage. These inner and outer limits of the Government Center area are linked internally by only two cross streets, New Chardon Street and New Sudbury Street, the remainder of the area, save for one small service street, being given over to pedestrian traffic. This plan not only honors the geography of the area and comes to sensible terms with such disparate existing features as the Fitzgerald Expressway, Faneuil Hall, and the Quincy Market, but, in combination with the building placement, it allows vehicular access to all the buildings of the Center while opening substantial areas to pedestrian traffic. The largest of these pedestrian areas is City Hall Plaza, the focus of the entire Center, an eight acre space with trees, a large fountain, and constantly changing levels achieved variously by sloping ground contours and irregular flights of steps. The Center's largest structure, the State Service Center, is planned around a large, irregular inner courtyard, and most of the other buildings in the area have some combination of inner and outer pedestrian spaces. The only axis in the entire complex is a directional sequence rather than a vista. It begins at the State House on top of Beacon Hill, runs through Suffolk County Court House and Pemberton Square, under the Center Plaza Building, across the south end of City Hall Plaza, over New Congress Street on a pedestrian bridge, alongside Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market, under the Expressway and out to the piers. In a short distance it touches on the most important governmental, commercial, and historic areas in Boston. It epitomizes the entire Government Center area in that it can be experienced only by someone moving through it, and not instantaneously as an organized visual entity.

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What Pei has managed in designing Government Center is the enlargement to contemporary scale of 17th century Boston. The new streets are few and broad, curved rather than straight, and have no axial function. Buildings are likewise few, large in size and scale, and widely spaced. They have no immediately apparent regular relationship, no squared-up symmetrical alignment. They occur at the places most likely to give them light and air, and as one walks around the area they appear and disappear in shifting and irregular patterns so that it is impossible to predict from one point in the Center what happens at any other. They do enclose a space, however. When one stands in the middle of City Hall Plaza new buildings seal all the visual escapes, although one is hardly conscious of the fact because the buildings are at such different distances and of such different characters. The moment one moves toward the periphery of the area older buildings come into view, so that the Center is simultaneously self-contained and open to surrounding neighborhoods, trailing off in various unexpected ways into the 18th, 19th, or earlier 20th centuries. In this way it is almost a paradigm of a modernist urban space, and it is telling that Pei should have arrived at such a space not by imposing the new but by encouraging it to grow from the old. His modernist environment is the updating of a medieval environment, and the two have more in common than either has with what came between. By preserving its past, Boston has turned out to be more up to date than other cities more consistently anxious to have the latest in urban planning, and if it is regrettable that the crowded charm of an older Boston must give way before the larger scale demands of the 20th century, it is at least fortunate that the character and basic principles of the old have been kept in creating the new.

It is characteristic of Boston, and of Pei's sensitivity to the city, that just those places in his design that seem least controlled and open to criticism turn back on the critic and assert themselves as the very essence of Boston's illogicality. One such place is the view from City Hall Plaza along Cambridge Street, which terminates in the graceful Otis house, West Church, and a corner of Paul Rudolph's massive State Service Center in corrugated concrete. Just as one is damning the planning that could place such disparate buildings together and wishing that the view had been more controlled, its termination more completely achieved by the sole dominance of either the old buildings or the new, one realizes that such impossible juxtapositions, the bane of the Beaux Arts mentality, are what occur throughout the city and give it its vitality. The beautiful Old State House, for example, dating from the early 18th century, stands in the middle of an intersection barely surrounded by enough sidewalk to allow two people to pass, a subway station in its basement, dwarfed by the modern office towers around it. One constantly wishes that

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it could be set off in a pleasant park, or that surrounding buildings could be demolished to give it breathing space, or that *some* benefit of modern planning could be bestowed on it, until one realizes that it was built in the middle of an intersection and has always been that way, crowded among other buildings, that it has always had some public or commercial function in its basement, and that if it were prettied up it might be pleasanter for tourists, but it would be far less the functioning reality it has been for the past two centuries.

Another example of apparently casual planning within the Center is the block separating the State Service Center from the Kennedy Office Building, it contains an odd assortment of buildings, two of which are existing structures and the remainder of which are rather small and architecturally conservative new buildings. The entire block is an anomaly within the Center's composition of single large new structures, but, typically, it contains one building of great appeal on both a human and an esthetic basis. A small, round red brick building of snail-like convolutions, this distinguished little pavilion was originally built as a temporary office of the New England Merchants National Bank. It was so well liked, however, that when the time came for it to be abandoned a movement was started to save it, and it now houses the Boston Press Club. Together with José Luis Sert's proposed small chapel nearby, and Kallmann and McKinnell's ziggurat-like brick subway entrance, the Press Club building promises to provide welcome relief for Government Center, both in scale and architectural quality.

Major architectural development in the Government Center area has been roughly equally divided between public and private sponsors. The City Hall and Government Center Parking Garage (both by Kallmann and McKinnell), the State Service Center (Paul Rudolph), and the John F. Kennedy Federal Office Building (Walter Gropius) are public projects. The Center Plaza Office Building (Welton Becket), New England Merchants National Bank (Edward Larrabee Barnes), and Center Hotel and Office Building (Raymond and Rado) are being privately constructed. In each case the architects agreed to adhere to the building dimensions and volumes laid out by Pei and their problems were not so much those of creating masses as of the allocation of space and of detailing and finishing. At the moment only the Federal Building, City Hall, the Center Plaza building, and the New England Merchants Bank are far enough along to gauge their architectural quality. Surveying the area, one is first surprised that the public commissions have gone to bigger architectural names than the private commissions, and then disappointed that the results of those commissions, City Hall excepted, is not a group of exciting and first-rate structures but merely the establishment of a high level of architectural mediocrity for the Center as a whole. In this respect the Center recalls Washington, a city with few architectural disasters,

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but equally few architectural masterpieces, an agglomeration of the acceptably inoffensive. Barnes's bank is a huge and featureless building of tinted glass, bronze casements, and a rather handsome pink granite. Its sleek, rich conservatism might well have appealed to, say, Mussolini, and it is unlikely actively to offend anyone unaware of the fact that it was built in place of projects by Pier Luigi Nervi and Marcel Breuer which were felt to be financially unfeasible. Only slightly more successful is Gropius' Federal Office Building. Like federal government buildings everywhere it is a vast structure of repetitive rhythms, conservatively faced (in pre-cast stone) and simply finished. Its greatest interest is in the juxtaposition of its double slab towers and adjoining lower section, presumably Pei's invention rather than Gropius'. Considered together with the Pan Am Building in New York and even such earlier works as the Graduate Center at Harvard, it leaves one with serious reservations about Gropius' ultimate stature as an architect, as opposed to his undoubted talents as a teacher and organizer. Becket's Center Plaza building is hardly better. Somewhat less unified because of the alternation of brick and cast stone in its façade, the repeated pattern of its deep window reveals brings it to the verge of fussiness, although the rhythms of its patterned façade are less staccato than are those of the Federal Building and it is in general better finished. Both buildings take welcome cognizance of pedestrians, again one supposes because of Pei, Center Plaza with a pleasant ground level arcade and the Federal Building by being raised on piers. The justification of the adventurelessness of these buildings on the grounds that they provide an unassertive background for the City Hall and its Plaza is unconvincing to me. I cannot believe that architectural quality is a detriment or its lack an advantage, and if the Nervi project had gone through and the Federal Building been designed by such a master of the suavely executed slab as Mies van der Rohe it seems to me that the entire Center would have been immeasurably enhanced. As it is, the planning is very good indeed, the City Hall and the smaller "one-room" buildings of very high quality, but the general architectural character will leave the future with examples of mid-20th century taste rather than really substantial contributions to the history of American architecture.

In a subsequent article, I shall deal with the City Hall in detail.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music Chronicle

WHAT THE VIOLINIST ALEXANDER SCHNEIDER does best of all is to lead a string quartet in a quartet by Haydn, in which he gets the members of the group to produce enlivened playing that points up the life in Haydn's writing in extraordinary fashion. And it was with such a performance of one of the less frequently heard Haydn quartets, Op. 17 No. 1, whose slow movement proved to be especially fine, that Schneider—with Isidore Cohen, Samuel Rhodes and Leslie Parnas as his excellent associates—opened the first of the Harvard Summer School concerts in Sanders Theater last summer. Mozart's Divertimento K.563 for string trio followed, played by Schneider, Rhodes and Parnas very beautifully for the most part, but with occasional expressive vehemence in the slow movement that I found excessive. And Schubert's Quintet Op. 163, with Robert Sylvester as second cello, was distorted by this excessive vehemence from first to last.

The second concert offered Mozart's two piano quartets, in which the composer Leon Kirchner played the piano now too loudly, now too mincingly, with Jaime Laredo, whose violin tone was unpleasantly wiry, Boris Kroyt and Parnas; and Laredo's tone flawed the performance of Beethoven's Serenade Op. 8 for string trio. At the third concert the soprano Benita Valente used her agreeable voice with good musical effect in songs of Haydn, Wolf, Fauré, Debussy and Schubert; but the voice lacked the reserve power required for the sustained intensity of the long phrases of Schubert's *Nacht und Träume*. Her singing was admirably supported by Richard Goode's piano-playing; but Harold Wright's playing of the clarinet part in Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* was mediocre.

Most interesting was the final concert, at which the first two tableaux of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* were followed by four preliminary versions of these two, and then the entire final work was performed. In the preliminary versions of 1914, 1915 and 1916 Stravinsky tried various instrumental combinations that included woodwinds, brass and strings; and it was interesting to hear how even with these his aural image was basically percussive; so that it was no surprise that in the preliminary version of 1919 he eliminated all the winds and strings, retaining drums and other percussion and cimbaloms, and adding a harmonium and pianola (whose part had to be played on several pianos this time)—which led to the final four pianos, drums and other percussion of the completed work of 1921-23. Not only was it interesting to hear the successive versions; but for the first time since the New York premiere Stokowski conducted for the League of Composers

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in the twenties I enjoyed hearing the work performed by itself; and I think this was because the conductor, Claudio Spies, professor of music at Swarthmore College, directed attention to the rhythmic variety and power (which makes the work an effective sound-track for the Nijinska and Robbins ballets) and away from the monotonous vocal reiteration. He had good performers: Janet Graham, soprano, Jean Nibbelink, mezzo-soprano, Pamela Gore, mezzo-soprano (in the preliminary versions), Theodore Anderson, tenor, William Graf, bass, and members of Gregg Smith's Harvard Summer Chorus, Joel Lazar's Cantabrigia Orchestra, and Music S-259, a seminar in the performance of contemporary music.

A smaller instrumental group from this seminar opened the concert with Schönberg's Serenade Op. 24, another of the works of his that communicate to me no expressive sense or mere internal coherence in the sounds my ear finds hideous. I was left deploring the musicians' waste of the time and work required by a piece so difficult to perform and so little worth performing; deploring, therefore, a seminar for such waste of time and work on the performing of such music; deploring, further, the years of polemics that had succeeded in getting musicians to believe in the value of the music that justified the expenditure of time and work on the seminar and the performance; and reaching, in the end, a thought about Schönberg that I had reached earlier about Karl Marx. Twenty years ago Reinhold Niebuhr began a *Nation* review of a book on Soviet Russia with the statement "We are only beginning to appreciate that the real tragedy of our age lies in the fact that the Marxist alternative to the injustices of our society should have generated cruelties and injustices so much worse than those which Marxism challenged, and should nevertheless be able to gain the devotion of millions of desperate people in Europe and particularly in Asia upon the basis of the original dream, as if the dream had not turned into a nightmare." Considering these consequences of Marx's existence on earth, I though this existence could be regarded as one of the great disasters in human history. And considering not so much Schönberg's own distorted and worthless music as the distortions in music and musical life that his existence resulted in, I think that existence can also be regarded as a major disaster in the history of music.

A performance on a phonograph record, last summer, impels me to this additional comment on Daniel Barenboim. It was a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto K.453 with Barenboim as soloist and conductor—as soloist playing the music and the piano crudely; as conductor unable to achieve even in the small English Chamber Orchestra the balance necessary for clarity of texture, so that the bassoons obscured the delightful flute-and-oboe flutters which conclude the opening statement; and as musician exhibiting in the performance no awareness of so breathtaking a detail as the shift to E flat in bar 49.

The program for the New York City Opera's production in October

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of Hugo Weisgall's new opera, *Nine Rivers from Jordan,* included an article by Mr. Weisgall in which he observed that:

> the operatic form has not been too hospitable to complex subject matter. . . . It took Kierkegaard and Denis de Rougemont, not to mention Frazer and Freud, to tell us what *Don Giovanni* and *Tristan* are really all about. But even these works and the questions they raise are simple when compared with imposing artistic form on such problems as collective guilt, or the responsibility for the concentration camps, or the human condition "after the bomb." Yet this is the subject matter that I feel cannot be avoided by the contemporary musical theater . . . if opera is to remain a valid 20th-century form.

My own view is that opera's remaining a valid 20th-century form depends not at all on its dealing with this subject matter or any other, *and entirely on its offering the music of high quality and expressive* force that can impose heightening artistic form on whatever subject the text deals with. Mr. Weisgall's unpleasant-sounding and expressively pointless music imposed no such heightening artistic form on Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* some years ago; and now his endless pointlessly ugly music imposes none on Denis Johnston's text for *Nine Rivers,* which itself imposes no artistic form on the problems Mr. Weisgall's mind is obsessed by. The production of his opera was still another waste of the talents and energies of the company's performing forces and of the Ford Foundation's money.

On the other hand, the young pianist André Watts, whom I heard for the first time at his recital in Philharmonic Hall, exhibited an impressive ability to impose heightening form on his realizations of the works he played. His delivery of the poignant opening melody of Mozart's Rondo in A minor was excessively mannered; but after that there was in this piece no more of the "Chopin manner" that *The Times's* Donal Henahan reported: the playing combined simplicity and tensile strength with lyrical grace; and an intensification of the florid writing of the last recurrence of the melody gave it climactic expressive force. Nor did Chopin's Nocturnes Op. 37 No. 1 and Op. 27 No. 1 "swoon," as Henahan reported: the melody, on the contrary, was enunciated with a limpid simplicity and grace that made these performances possibly the most beautiful and impressive of the achievements that included an admirably shaped and expressively effective performance of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata and beautiful realizations of Debussy's subtly colored and evocative *La Soirée dans Grenade* ("overstudied and finicky," for Henahan) and *Jardins sous la pluie.*

Not only did Berlioz command a superb prose style, but even his music criticism—for example, the essay on Rossini's *William Tell* in

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Strunk's *Source Readings in Music History*—conveys a personal intensity and passion, a greatness of spirit, that bring tears to my eyes when I read it. And these personal qualities are of course even more moving in his letters. For more than ten years the only collection in English was the one published by the ubiquitous Jacques Barzun, who did a poor job of selection and a worse one of translation. My examples of his mistranslation led him, in the introduction to his alleged new translation of Berlioz's *Evenings in the Orchestra,* to contend that real translation had to be the "recomposition" he had done to express in English the "atmosphere and continuity of thought, rhythm and emphasis" of Berlioz's French. This amounted to saying that if Berlioz wrote in English today he would write the prissy and fussy prose of Barzun—which I find impossible to believe. But it was believed by Barzun's fellow-academic, a professor of music named Homer Ulrich, who in a review of a new translation of *Evenings in the Orchestra* wrote:

> Fortescue's [translation] is acceptable in spite of being somewhat literal; Barzun's, I imagine, more nearly captures the essence of Berlioz's style. A single comparison will make the point:
> Fortescue: "Méhul had none of the prejudices of some of his contemporaries against certain musical practices, which he used skilfully when he saw fit, and which the formalists wish to ban without exception."
> Barzun: "Méhul had none of the preconceived ideas held by some of his contemporaries with regard to artistic method. He made use of certain devices whenever he considered them useful, even though the professors of routine prohibit them in all cases."

Ulrich's "I imagine" seems to indicate that this scholar spoke without actually comparing the two translations with Berlioz's French. And when one does look at the French—*"Méhul n'était imbu d'aucun des préjugés de quelques-uns de ses contemporains à l'égard de certains moyens d'art qu'il employait habilement lorsqu'il les jugeait convenables, et que les routiniers veulent proscrire en tout cas"*—it turns out that precisely because Fortescue adheres more closely to Berlioz's words, order of words and sentence structure, he more nearly captures in English the essential style of the French. And this is demonstrated again in Humphrey Searle's recent volume of Berlioz letters,[1] which includes translations of some of the letters in the Barzun volume that stay closer to the Berlioz originals and as a result are not only accurate where Barzun's are inaccurate but produce an approximation in English of the Berlioz style in French where Barzun substitutes the Barzun style.

But Searle himself departs from his correct procedure occasionally, with damage to the result. This happens in the extraordinarily moving

[1] HECTOR BERLIOZ: A SELECTION FROM HIS LETTERS, edited by *Humphrey Searle.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.95.

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letter (not included in Barzun's volume) in which the 21-year-old Berlioz tells his father of his unalterable decision to become a composer. I first encountered it in W. J. Turner's *Berlioz;* and surprised by the differences in Searle's version, I looked up the original, which revealed that both Turner and Searle depart from it, sometimes at different points, sometimes at the same points, and always with loss.

"Je suis entrainé volontairement vers une carrière magnifique (on ne peut donner d'autre épithète à celle des arts) et non pas vers ma perte," Berlioz writes. Turner's translation is "I have voluntarily embarked upon a magnificent career (one can give no other epithet to that of the arts) and not upon my destruction"; Searle's is "I am driven voluntarily towards a magnificent career (no other epithet can be applied to the career of an artist) and I am not in the least heading for perdition." "I have voluntarily embarked" makes better sense than "I am driven voluntarily," but not the sense of Berlioz's French, which is "I am willingly swept away" toward the magnificent career; and the *"perte"* he is not being swept towards is not his perdition but his ruin. Where Berlioz writes: *"Si j'étais condamné sans remission à mourir de faim dans le cas de non-réussite (je n'en persisterais pas moins à la verité)"*—"If I were mercilessly condemned to die of hunger in the event of failure (this would not lessen my persistence, I assure you)"—Turner makes it "If I am mercilessly condemned to die of hunger in the event of failure (and in truth I would not stop sooner)" (Searle chooses to omit this moving passage). Where Berlioz writes: *"Tel est ma manière de penser, tel je suis, et rien au monde ne pourra me changer,"* Searle makes it "That is the way I think, the way I am, and nothing in the world will change me," which doesn't produce the effect of the repetition of *"tel"*: "That is the way I think, that is what I am." Similarly, when Berlioz asks his father not to attribute his letter to an excited impulse, and adds: *"Jamais peut-être je n'ai été plus calme,"* the English must be "Never perhaps have I been more calm," not Turner's "for I have never been more calm" or Searle's "I have perhaps never been so calm."

But even with these occasional imperfections in Searle's translations the letters communicate the distinguished mind, personality and literary style that make them extraordinary and moving documents which no one should miss. In saying this I differ from the reviewer of the Searle volume and of a new reprint of Berlioz's *Memoirs* in *Book Week,* who pronounced Ernest Newman's editorial annotations of the *Memoirs* "at times more interesting than [Berlioz's] text," and Berlioz's prose attractive in much the same way as his music—"fluent, vivacious, humorous, adept at anecdotes, resourcesful at description, and occasionally brilliant in striking off a phrase." As for the music, the present excessive adulation of "this sometimes thrilling but frequently disappointing composer" was attributed to "the public's fascination with extraordinary acoustic effects, especially now that these can be delivered like bombshells into a well-rigged living room," and also to

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"the loss of spiritual aspiration that makes a composer like Bruckner ignored today" by a public whose "taste is for a music that is picturesque, animated, plastically graceful, and full of theatrical emotions and attitudes and not for a music, like Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, that is sublime both in its pristine innocence and in its religious longings and illuminations." And he concluded that absence of thought was obvious in both the prose and the music, and that in both Berlioz produced "relatively little that invites us to respond at the deeper levels of the spirit."

One would think that writing about a dead composer, not a living critic, Albert Goldman wouldn't have reason for disparaging inventions; but his review of the Berlioz books makes it clear that he writes in terms of such inventions no matter whom or what he is dealing with. A piece of writing is for him an operation of one-upmanship in relation to his subject; and this requires him to invent the subject's inferiority, by the pointing out of which he demonstrates his own superiority. In Berlioz's case it isn't only what Goldman invents in disparagement of Berlioz's mind, his music, his writing, that is untrue, but the subsidiary inventions of the larger context—like the explanation of Berlioz's popularity today by "the loss of spiritual aspiration that makes a composer like Bruckner ignored today," when in fact, at the very time Goldman was writing his review, a work of "spiritual aspiration" like Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* had just had two new recordings and was about to be performed in Cleveland and New York, and Bruckner's symphonies are being performed and recorded with a frequency that was unimaginable ten years ago. An editor publishing such writing is like the New York Stock Exchange listing the Beefsteak Mine stock that W. C. Fields gets mixed up with in *The Bank Dick.*

Opera companies everywhere persist in performing Rimsky-Korsakov's falsification of Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov;* but Sarah Caldwell, director of the Opera Company of Boston, rejects even Musorgsky's own 1872 revision of his work, and produced his first version of 1869. And in her prospectus for the present season she mentioned a possible production of Verdi's first version of *Macbeth,* instead of his revised version that has been produced and recorded until now. Does Miss Caldwell believe a composer's first idea of a work is an Original Sacred Truth concerning which he must not be allowed second thoughts? Or that his first idea is always better—or even that the first version of *Macbeth* is better? If she believes any of these, she is mistaken.

There are, certainly, instances where a composer's later changes are damaging in one way or another and should not be retained. The luxuriant later style of the Venusberg scene that Wagner inserted into *Tannhäuser* for the Paris production makes it incongruous with the rest of the work; the ballet music that Verdi introduced in the third act of *Otello* for the Paris production breaks dramatic continuity and

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tension; and both insertions should therefore be removed. But a year ago Erich Leinsdorf performed at Tanglewood Beethoven's first (1805) version of *Fidelio,* which caused one to marvel at how unerringly Beethoven had operated at every point in the revision of the diffuse, rambling and at times conventional and derivative writing, in the direction of the powerful conciseness and concentration in utterance and form of the 1814 masterpiece that we know. As for *Macbeth,* two of the pieces Verdi added in his revision—Lady Macbeth's second-act aria and her third-act duet with Macbeth—are, as Francis Toye remarks, among the best numbers in the opera; and he is correct in concluding that "the second version of 'Macbeth' is superior to the first and one would not willingly lose the admirable music it called forth." It is hard to imagine what other considerations make Miss Caldwell willing to lose this admirable music; but for that matter it is hard to understand her way of dealing with Musorgsky's *Boris.* Part of his 1872 revision was the addition of the two new scenes involving Marina, which are inferior and should therefore be omitted even from a performance of the 1872 version. But another addition was the new concluding scene in the forest of Kromy, in which the choral writing of the earlier scenes attains sheer incandescence; and this scene should be added even in a performance of the 1869 version; but Miss Caldwell sternly rejected it. And Musorgsky's other major 1872 revision was his complete rewriting of the scene in the Tsar's apartments, which creates the difficulty of deciding which of the two superb but different versions to perform. One can understand Miss Caldwell's choosing the bleak and somber 1869 version; but what is beyond comprehension is that this purist who would have none of the superb 1872 Kromy scene replaced Boris's two monologues in the 1869 version with the ones in the 1872 version, whose richer writing is incongruous with its bleak, somber context.

But this is a tiny example of the mindlessness which pervades every part of the world of music, including one in which intellectual rigor would seem to be a *sine qua non*—that of the musical scholars. Not being a scholar, I was aware only of the muddleheadedness in the writing for the general public by Paul Henry Lang, Curt Sachs, Alfred Einstein and Hugo Leichtentritt that I began to report thirty years ago; but these reports caused readers to inform me of *their* discoveries; and one reader in particular, a student at the University of North Carolina, sent me examples of Lang's and Einstein's lack of scholarly rigor—notably Einstein's in arriving at his erroneous conclusion that Boccherini's quintets for 2 cellos were really for 2 violas, which by now is part of the body of what Bernard Shaw called the "stale rubbish of the musical book-makers" that writers of concert reviews and record-album notes traffic in. And only a couple of years ago a young reader in Texas wrote that he had listened with friends to a privately circulated recording of a performance of the 1805 *Fidelio,* which had left them glad that Beethoven had had second thoughts about it, because

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they had found it to be "full of conventionalities and over-written passages"; and that as a result he had been amazed by the statement in Lang's *Music in Western Civilization:* "In its first version *Fidelio* shows the guiding hand of the same great classicist who admired so much the disposition of tonalities in *The Magic Flute,* who, like his revered model, Cherubini, used the leitmotif with discretion. . . . Despite the great advantages gained by the rewriting of the opera, the difference in time caused stylistic inequalities. . . . The opera should be restored to its original form." I am not aware of any "stylistic inequalities" in the 1814 *Fidelio,* but only of the "advantages" that make it a greater and more effective work of art than the 1805 version, and of Lang's unawareness of the primacy of esthetic values over historical interest in his insistence that despite the "advantages" of the 1814 version it is the 1805 version that should be performed: for him the version to hear is not the one that offers the experience of a great and effective work of art, but the one that enables us to observe certain facts of musical history—the operation of the "great classicist who admired so much the disposition of tonalities in *The Magic Flute*" and who, "like his revered model, Cherubini, used the leitmotif with discretion."

How was it, my Texas reader asked, that such remarks as Lang's "do not prevent [his book] from being given a revered place in the shelves of music libraries?"—a question which others have asked in connection with even worse statements in the book. And "what can I do when scholars are themselves apparently doing nothing about it?" One scholar's answer to this question was given by an English member of the fraternity, J. A. Westrup, who in *Music and Letters* a couple of years ago denounced my "exposing the errors of historians" on the ground that "such criticism is the province of historians, not journalists," and who denounced also my publishing the North Carolina student's exposure of Einstein's dealing with the Boccherini quintets on the ground that "people who are entitled to criticize a scholar like Alfred Einstein do not need the assistance of students at the University of North Carolina. They criticize on the basis of their own knowledge and do not pad out their pages with second-hand opinions."[2]

[2] The way the reputation that Einstein earned with certain genuine scholarly achievements—his revision of Köchel's Mozart catalogue, his transcribing of the many 16th-century madrigals in his book on the madrigal—has commanded respect for shoddy performances like his book on Mozart (in which the episode of the Boccherini quintets occurs) and continuing respect for him in spite of these shoddy performances—this I find amazing. For example, the *Mozart Companion* published by Oxford University Press in 1956 is dedicated to him by its contributors, who quote numerous statements from his *Mozart*—statements, on the one hand, concerning which the impressively rigorous scholar Friedrich Blume writes that Einstein's argument "is unconvincing," or that "one must question the validity of his opinion," or that his assumption is "arbitrary" or "completely invalid," or that he "incomprehensibly tried to claim [a sketch for a concerto movement which belongs to K.459] for . . . K.466"; and on the other hand, statements, quoted by less impressive contributors, which say nothing worth quoting, including pure, and often silly, conjectures about Mozart's motivations (e.g., the conjecture that in

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Certainly there have been scholars whose writing for the general public has exhibited the accurate musical perception and disciplined intellect that Lang's and Einstein's has not—Tovey, E. J. Dent, and more recently Gerald Abraham, whose *A Hundred Years of Music* is only the best-known of his excellent books. About fifteen years ago he was in charge of a BBC program of the kind that American commercial broadcasting has never offered—a series called *History in Sound of European Music,* comprising more than a hundred weekly programs of music worth listening to from every period, with informative comment. And this project made possible another. As a member of the editorial board of *The New Oxford History of Music* (the chairman being the professorial fool J. A. Westrup I mentioned earlier) Abraham was aware of the difficulty that faces a writer or editor of a book on music—that of illustration. One can quote a poem or reproduce a picture in a book; but one cannot provide in it the sound of a piece of music. At most one can print the piece in musical notation; but not everyone can read this notation and translate it into the actual sound of the piece; and this difficulty is increased with old music by the fact that the true sound of 16th-century keyboard music or vocal polyphony is not to be obtained on the modern piano, and that the music requires a knowledge of its own style of performance that few readers have. Abraham therefore persuaded HMV to record some of the performances that had been prepared for the broadcasts and issue them as a *History of Music in Sound,* each of whose ten volumes covered the period to be dealt with in the corresponding volume of *The New Oxford History* and was accompanied by a booklet containing the text of each piece, or part of it, in musical notation, with a translation of the words and informative notes. The series was issued here by RCA Victor, and is still listed as available. One of the most enjoyable was Volume 4, entitled *The Age of Humanism (1540-1630),* which offered madrigals of Marenzio, Wilbye, Weelkes and others; French chansons; church pieces by Victoria, Palestrina, Lassus, Tallis, Byrd, Gibbons and Morley, among others; a scene from Monteverdi's *Orfeo.* The recordings were supervised by Westrup; but the accompanying booklet was done by Abraham. And Abraham is the editor of the corresponding Volume 4 of *The New Oxford History* with the same title[3] that has taken 14

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the Scena and Rondo *Ch'io mi scordi di te/Non teme, amato bene* for soprano and piano obbligato ("for Mselle Storace and myself") Mozart "wanted to preserve the memory of this voice . . . and . . . wanted to leave with her in the piano part a souvenir of the taste and depth of his playing, and of the depth of his feeling for her"). Einstein once made a derisive reference to the writing he said was based not on music but on the writing of Tovey about music, not understanding that when writers like myself quoted a statement by Tovey it was because it stated so perceptively what we had experienced in the music, whereas Einstein's pretentious gabble of alleged profound insights revealed his lack of genuine musical perception.

[3] THE NEW OXFORD HISTORY OF MUSIC—VOLUME IV: THE AGE OF HUMANISM—1540-1630, edited by *Gerald Abraham.* Oxford University Press. $22.50.

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years to appear. It is a volume of almost 1000 pages, with writing by Abraham, Dent and others (not including Westrup) on the various types of vocal and instrumental music of the period; and I think one may assume it is the most authoritative book on this music that the general reader can find.

Another member of the editorial board of *The New Oxford History,* Martin Cooper, is one of the better English writers on music, who once made the perceptive observation that "if you really listen to Berlioz's music, really follow it . . . it is . . . alive with the most astonishing vitality," and that "for all the richness of his palette . . . Berlioz is not a sensualist"—the four brass bands and 18 kettledrums of the *"Tuba mirum"* of the *Requiem* being "used by a mind so completely in the grip of a poetic idea, so absolutely alien to all exploitation of sound for its own sake (the sensualist's music), that the listener's soul and not his nerves are affected." But on page 13 of his recently published collection of articles and broadcasts[4] he argues that Berlioz "may have benefitted by the fact that much of even his best music has been comparatively rarely performed. . . . When we hear a recording or an occasional performance of *Romeo and Juliet, Harold in Italy, The Damnation of Faust* or *The Childhood of Christ,* even of *The Trojans,* we are struck by the intense power and beauty of passages here and there," and we forgive or overlook "the original if often unsatisfactory design of the whole work and . . . the extraordinary juxtaposition of pathos and bathos." But if these works and others were "in the normal, week-by-week repertory of our orchestras and opera houses" a few parts "might well prove imperishable, but the proportion of alloy to pure gold might become painfully plain," and Berlioz's name would "sink very much below the point at which he is rated by his admirers, if not quite as low as that which he is assigned by his detractors." But one doesn't listen to Berlioz to obtain a general idea of how high or low to rate him as a composer; one listens to experience his artistic operation and its effect—which is to say, the particular artistic operation and effect of each particular work. And when one does that one says of Berlioz what Tovey said of Schubert: that the greatness of one work is not lessened by the weaknesses of another; that "the highest qualities attained in important parts of a great work are as indestructible by weaknesses elsewhere as if the weaknesses were the accidents of physical ruin"; that Berlioz's inequalities, therefore, do not make him an artist of less than the greatness that must be conceded to him on the strength of his important works: "It does not matter when, where, and how he lapses therefrom: the quality is there, and nothing in its neighborhood can make it ridiculous." If one knew nothing but *Les Nuits d'Eté* one would have to say the man who wrote it was a great musical artist; the additional incandescent masterpieces confirm this; and any weaknesses in these or other works do not change it.

[4] IDEAS AND MUSIC, by *Martin Cooper.* Chilton. $6.50.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

IF ALBEE WERE NOT SO ARROGANT, one would view his desperate stratagems with pity. When you have failed with every kind of play, including adaptations of novels and other people's plays, the last remaining maneuver is the nonplay. Finding himself in a box, Albee has contrived two interlocking nonplays, based, apparently, on a mathematical error: it is by multiplying, not by adding, minuses that you get a plus. *Box* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung,* when run together like two ink blots of different colors, raise the Rorschach test to new dramatic heights.

Box is a fifteen-to-twenty-minute taped monologue piped into a darkened theatre with only the outlines of a large empty box gleaming in ultra-violet light on the black stage. As you gaze at this piece of hollow geometry for a *mauvais quart d'heure,* Ruth White's voice from the P.A. system flutteringly harangues you with platitudes and non sequiturs about life and art, including some impudent but prestigious references to Bach and to our arts slipping into mere crafts—as if this redundant message were necessary when we have *Box* before or (considering the placing of the loudspeaker) behind us. Albee's renowned command of language once again manifests itself in such hearty solecisms as "off of."

Lights go on as the box gradually fills up with a schematic setting: on the deck of an ocean liner, Chairman Mao stands erect, an old woman squats in a corner by her shabby suitcase, and a minister and a "Long Winded Lady" (as the program identifies her) lounge in deck chairs. There ensues what Albee no doubt thinks of as a fugue for speaking voices. The old woman recites a trashy piece of thirties doggerel, "Over the Hill to the Poorhouse," by one Will Carlton or Carleton, whoever he may be, about a poor, creaky critter whose ungrateful children consign her sunset years to the poorhouse. This is interrupted periodically by Chairman Mao (who strips off a rubber Mao mask to reveal beneath it—a Mao face; he is nothing but a walking set of Chinese boxes); he recites endlessly from his aphorisms. This is interrupted in turn by the Long Winded Lady, who relates her life with her husband, his death, her estrangement from her daughter, and her attempted suicide by leaping from just such an ocean liner. The clergyman responds to her with various more or less commensurate gestures, but never utters a syllable. This is, presumably, the Cagey element in the fugue. Mao paces about the stage and the entire auditorium; the old woman makes one slow symbolic trajectory toward an upstage perch; the LWL and the minister walk about a

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little. The three voices spell one another, and are joined, toward the end of the play, by the taped voice from *Box* interjecting some of its own previous pronouncements in what is supposed to be an ironically pregnant *stretto.*

But, alas, even though some members of the sparse audience laughed relentlessly at the satiric depths they perceived in the random juxtapositions of these unrelated voices, I felt doused with discrepancy. Rather than as a fugue, the exercise struck me as a piece of vocal *cadavre exquis,* without even the amusing *trouvailles* bequeathed by Chance on that famous surrealist parlor game. One can perhaps extract some quasi-meanings (like teeth from a toothless mouth): the commonplaces of communism vs. the banalities of the bourgeoisie; the parallel miseries of the rich and the poor; the shibboleths of Mao's gospel vs. the silences of the man of God. But these are not so much legitimate explications as counsels of despair. In a fugue, in any case, there is development. Here, once the quartet is visually and vocally presented, there is nowhere to go. The grandam recites her WPA poetastery with ever campier emphases, and with increasingly dogged repetition of the wretched verses; Mao, sprouting successively from opposite prosecenium boxes, spouts the same minimal maxims; the clergyman produces more and more D. W. Griffithish faces and gestures. The one thing that moves on freely is the LWL's narrative—but that is just what it is: a rambling, pettifogging, pseudoliterate monologue of strictly nondramatic verbiage.

We get the same ambitious, artificial, circumlocutory prose Albee keeps elaborating in his later, sterile works. It consists of false starts, emendations, indirections, apologies, and general syntactic deviousness. One guesses that Albee imagines this to be some wonderful cross between Beckett and Joyce; in fact, it is a barren, puerile mannerism. It suggests a kind of doddering pedantry that Albee might attribute to a particular character—if it were not so often out of character, and if a good many of his more recent favorite personages did not speak exactly, or inexactly, like this. And always that pathetic intellectual climbing of the (insufficiently) self-educated: "They didn't know who Trollope was!—that is a life for you," complains the LWL, and one winces for Albee. For behind such outcries we have come to recognize the genteel author's feelings of superiority over, and especially *against,* the unwashed that surround him, or that he chooses to surround himself with. Significantly, this motif is equally frequent in Tennessee Williams. And Trollope as status symbol! Next thing it will be Rupert Brooke.

But suppose it were the character that is being ridiculed. So much the worse for play and playwright; it would mean that they are suffering from delusions of being Beckett, who alone can get away with this sort of thing by virtue of much greater sensitivity to words and to the essential foibles of human nature. There is even a con-

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scious or unconscious allusion to Beckett in the LWL's repeated references to falling and "all that falling," including, if my memory isn't playing Albeesque tricks on me, to falling *upward.* Typical of this monologue is a line like "that was more seeing than landing—if you like a pun," with that built-in escape clause yielding irritation rather than mitigation. Or take this, from an evocation of the LWL's husband: "His scrotum was large, and not only for small men. His penis also long and of a neat proportion . . . I cupped my hands around his lovely scrotum . . ." Balls, if you like a pun. Though, obviously, it is testicles that are large, "scrotum" is one of the few remaining words that have not been heard on the stage, and Albee wants to get there first with the absolute most. And, of course, it should be "for a small man"—or could this be deliberate catachresis? And who but a poor stylist would write "His penis also long and of a neat proportion," which is both fancy and vague. And who would describe a scrotum as "lovely"? Certainly not a woman. What need is there, above all, for this entire, here abbreviated, speech? But Albee's pretensions are large, and not only for a small man.

Shock value is always the last resort of the impotent. Indeed, when the taped voice joins in, pseudosignificance runs amuck as darkness engulfs the scene. Alan Schneider has made resolute but arbitrary attempts at moving the characters around a little, but to no great effect, except perhaps to make the "fugue" sound stereophonic. Sudie Bond continues to play the one part she has played ever since *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream,* and there may be some perverse glory in having built a career on Albee's granny. The parts of Mao and the minister are equally nonexistent, but Nancy Kelly makes the LWL as amiable as possible. Ruth White's taped voice babbles on almost as magisterially as Ruth White in the flesh. As for Albee, where does he go from here? He could perhaps eliminate the third dimension from his box, or have us sit in a voiceless dark. We'll get to the grass roots of theatre yet, even if it means burrowing underground like a mole.

Pretentiousness and spuriousness of a more commercial sort can be had in *The Man in the Glass Booth.* Robert Shaw is a remarkable actor, but as a playwright he is hopelessly hokey. (I don't much care for his fiction, either.) We are asked to believe here that New York's richest Jew, Arthur Goldman, who sits in a glass-plated pleasure dome above Manhattan, most of which he owns, and semihumorously terrorizes everyone from his secretary to remote strangers, suddenly transforms himself into one Colonel Dorff, a dreaded former SS monster, and lets himself fall into the hands of three Israelis who will take him back to Jerusalem to stand trial. In the second act, we are asked to swallow Dorff's black-humored ribbing of the Israeli interrogators, rejecting his former secretary's offer to bear favorable witness, going into the glass booth in the courtroom to spew forth

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Nazi sophistries and eulogies, and insisting that the Jews would have done the same had they been chosen by Hitler. Just as he is about to be sentenced to death, and to his intense displeasure, he is saved by a surprise witness who erupts from the audience. A Mrs. Lehmann identifies the prisoner as indeed the Jew Goldman, a cousin of the Nazi Dorff who happened to be the commander of the camp in which she and Goldman were held. Dorff was finally torn to bits by the inmates, and Goldman ran riot on a German-murdering spree, to end up as a crazy American millionaire. His intention, as he now admits, was to show the world what an unrepentant and unreconstructed Nazi truly is, and thus become a supreme object lesson.

Preposterous as this résumé sounds, it is far less so than the play itself. To raise only the most obvious of many questions, why doesn't anyone in the Israeli government know about Dorff's Orphic demise until Mrs. Lehmann, suitably near the end of the play, volunteers her climactic revelation? Defenders of this turbid confection will say that it isn't meant to be a piece of naturalism, that it is rather an absurdist black comedy. In that case, why all the realistic trappings, why all the elaborate explanations, why the close imitation of the Eichmann trial? So much for the absurdism. And the comedy? If you think hearing an apparent SS officer say, "Mind you, I've always liked kosher. We've got a kosher restaurant in New York killed more Hebrews than I did," is funny, then comedy it is. At another point, when Goldman envisions "the first Jewish-American pope," his doctor says, "Pope Hyman." Whereupon we get the following exchange: "I didn't know you was a wit.—I'm not.—Keep at it: everything is a matter of practice." If Robert Shaw ever makes it as a playwright, I shall be obliged to agree with this proposition.

Shaw is exploiting genocide and a highly controversial trial for a contrived tragi-farce that is supposed to say something about the interchangeability of personalities, about circumstances (if not, indeed, clothes) making the man, about the flimsy boundary between victim and executioner. But this antiquated and at the same time over-simplified notion, executed with a wit that is anything but Shavian, does not entitle Shaw to horse around with shattering immensities. The model for this charade seems to be Dürrenmatt, but the Swiss dramatist is, at his best, incomparably sounder and funnier. Yet Dürrenmatt, too, seems to think that madness is a great source of comedy, which it isn't. Goldman's ravings alternating with cutely demented wisecracks are too alienated and alienating to involve us emotionally, and the idea content, especially as filtered through lunacy, is too thin to stimulate thought.

Reviewers, even those unsympathetic to the play, tended to swoon over Donald Pleasence's performance. Now it seems to me that no actor who is always almost exactly the same is truly good; no actor who becomes possessed by his role instead of possessing it is truly

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good; no actor who overemphasizes what is already overemphatic is even intelligent. If ever a part demanded playing against the grain, this Goldman-Dorff is it; Pleasence merely piles madness on more madness. Harold Pinter, who directed, has tried to infuse some of his characteristic understatements and silences; this may help the earlier scenes but hobbles the climactic trial scene, which could use some Kazan or Tony Richardson. Among the supporting players, Laurence Pressman is plausible as the meek but not unambitious secretary; the others are mired in their material.

This season's most interesting offering so far is *The Great White Hope*. Howard Sackler's play, transferred from Washington's Arena Stage, revised and partly recast, generates considerable excitement. Generating excitement is not nearly so good as generating art, but, in these lean times, may have to do. How nice if Sackler, who had the good sense to use Shakespeare and Brecht as his models, had come up with something worthy of them; unfortunately, the writing is only hard-working, competent but overambitious middlebrow stuff.

The play is the semifictionalized story of Jack Johnson, the first Negro heavyweight champion of the world. In the play, Jack Jefferson (could the name Johnson be too dirty a word for a white liberal to apply to his black hero?) wins the championship against mighty odds, and, to the despair of white America, seems unbeatable. Worse yet, he has a white girl friend; this, however, enables his enemies in and out of the FBI to frame him under the Mann Act. He beats a trumped-up three-year rap by escaping to Europe with Ellie, his girl, Goldie, his Jewish manager, and Tick, his Negro trainer. He defeats all contenders, but it becomes harder and harder for him to get fights or even to remain unmolested in any country for very long: in various ways, America continues to hound him. He performs in shabby night-club acts and stoops to other indignities, but refuses lucrative offers to throw the championship in a rigged fight. When his mother dies back home and he can't even attend her funeral, Jack angrily leads his faithful band to Mexico, whence he hurls defiance across the border while, in dire financial straits, he keeps in training for a possible fight. His bitterness is so great that he ends by driving his devoted girl to her death. Broken by this as well as by the Mexican government's expulsion order (under U.S. coercion), Jefferson agrees to fight "the great white hope" who has finally been found and groomed against him; he agrees, furthermore, to lose in exchange for not only money but also the dropping of charges against him. The Negroes are still solidly behind him, but when he loses the big fight in Havana (apparently honestly), they too reject him.

Many things seem wrong to me with this sprawling three-act and nineteen-scene play. My first objection may seem irrelevant, but I consider it extremely unfortunate that boxing should be made into a heroic and noble thing. This so-called sport, which strikes me as

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the ugliest and most anachronistic of pastimes, can hardly be squared with our supposed discouragement of blood lust and our curbs on most (unfortunately not all) sports involving similar cruelty to animals. The leading Swedish newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter,* in its campaign against boxing, keeps unearthing numerous deaths in or just after the ring, which elsewhere go unreported. Jack Johnson may be a perfect symbol of the black hero-victim, there may have been no other avenues to fame for Negroes in the early 1900's, and Howard Sackler may certainly not have *intended* to glorify prizefighting, but all this and Pindar notwithstanding, I find the central positive value of the play a profoundly distasteful one, which diminishes the work *ipso facto.*

Scarcely more attractive is the ideological oversimplification. The play's moral universe is about as simplistic and false as LeRoi Jones's, with this difference: there is a *tertium quid* between all those lovable Negroes and appalling whites: Ellie and Goldie, who are good though white, apparently because they are Jewish. The world, I fear, just isn't that black-and-Jewish-and-white. At least that notion strikes me as equally open to doubt as the one that performing a musical-comedy version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* an eminently respectable pursuit in Siam, as Rodgers and Hammerstein have taught us, should, in a Budapest cabaret, be appreciably worse than beating or being beaten to a bloody pulp in the arena.

Next comes the problem of focus. By trying for a personal tragedy as well as a racial one, scope as well as intimacy; by including even a proleptic view of the future in the unlikely character of Scipio, a Black Panther *avant la lettre*; by further adding vignettes satirizing the faults of various nationalities; by trying to write in high and low style successively when not simultaneously, Sackler finds himself in the position of the man who wants to paint a giant fresco and illuminate an initial both at once. Shakespeare could do it, true; but he could do anything. Brecht could do it, sometimes. Sackler cannot do it, or at least not smoothly and compellingly.

There are also some disturbing evasions. We never see the crucial events, the prizefights, which remain offstage. But the same holds true for such diverse masterpieces as *Oedipus Rex* and *Penthesilea,* for example. There, however, we have the dramatic poetry of Sophocles and Kleist to compensate for the lack—even to surpass the actual events in the most brilliant representation. Sackler's last scene, with fight fans reporting the bout from the top of a ladder in barely comprehensible shouts, falls flat. More crippling, however, is the cop-out: did Jefferson throw the fight or lose it fair and square? Sackler seems to be too much in love with his hero to accept either alternative; he leaves the matter hanging, and when the now victorious challenger is carried on stage, his face is one bleeding gash, as if a bomb had carried off most of it, whereas Jack's still has a human shape to it. At this point, Sackler has definitely thrown *his* fight.

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But the main weakness of the play is its attempt at poetry. No viewer, myself included, could begin to smell blank verse behind what is heard at the Alvin Theatre. Yet on consulting the printed text, there it suddenly is. This is the school of blank verse extending from T. S. Eliot to Rolf Hochhuth, noted for the unnoticeableness of its pentameters. Which raises the legitimate question: why bother at all? Is anything gained by the meter in this passage typical of most of the play:

> Why, it juss like whut Presden Teddy say,
> Square Deal for Evvybody!—come on, les treat em right,
> git some chairs out here, they gonna stay, OK,
> no use they standing, some old-timie folks
> long with em here . . .

But observe that even in the rarer, more poetic passages, as in this meditation by Cap'n Dan, a former champion and now Jack's nemesis, nothing much is achieved:

> Now you'll say, Oh, that's only your title in sports—
> no, it's more. Admit it. And more than if one got to be
> world's best engineer, or smartest politician,
> or number one opera singer, or world's biggest genius
> at making things from peanuts. No calamity there.
> But Heavyweight Champion of the World, well
> it feels like the world's got a shadow across it,
> Everything's—no joke intended—kind of darker,
> and different, like it's shrinking . . .

I cannot help feeling that it is *lèse-majesté* to haul dramatic blank verse out of its mausoleum for such street-corner turns. And it's no use saying that that is what such people sound like. Fine, but let them sound like that in prose, where they belong.

Nevertheless, the play has energy and variety. It knows when to hurtle and when to sashay forward, there is humor in it, and it does generate a growing sense of entrapment and doom. The Negro speech patterns are accurate and flavorous, and the protagonist, for one, does emerge a full and appealing human being. The other parts, even when they are no more than stereotypes, are at least swirlingly animated stereotypes. The device of addressing the audience is positively run into the groundlings, but some of the text's more awkward speeches are mercifully cut in the stage version. Sackler has at any rate sketched in a historical play conceived in the grand style; some credit is due for the very boldness of his concept.

The production is better than anything currently on view in New York. Edwin Sherin, the director, has coaxed every spark to be had out of rapid movement, lightning transitions, connecting music and disconnecting voices shrilling and sputtering. His one fault is to have driven his actors to shouting overmuch; given the initial problem

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some of them have with diction, a goodly proportion of lines never makes it comprehensibly across the footlights. This, regrettably, goes most for James Earl Jones. Otherwise, his Jack Jefferson is a magnificent creation, so much so that the play is unimaginable without Jones. Physically, he is just the shiny-pated, swift-footed, barrel-chested, debonair giant Johnson must have been; quick-witted, too, and jovial, charmingly embodying that real or imagined animality that white men fear for real or imaginary reasons. His emotional range is no less colossal: from bubbling badinage through ironic jabs to overwhelming grief at the death of his girl—human, animal, titanic—Jones encompasses everything with the precision and ease of a master. Particularly fine is his timing: the entire performance is paced with the sensitivity to tempo and inflection of a virtuoso *lieder* singer. His breakdown over Ellie's body is as unbearably moving a piece of acting as I have ever seen.

Barely if at all behind him is Jane Alexander as Ellie. A *jolie laide* if ever there was one, she plays the part with an endearing firmness and modesty—almost a primness, if you can imagine primness as the vehicle for tenderness, warmth, and passionate resolve. Whether she is quietly defending her relationship against various legal bloodhounds or feverishly clinging to it in the face of her lover's seemingly brutal rejection, she maintains (along with flawless diction) a sturdy grip on the human dignity of the part. It is Miss Alexander's triumph that without the slightest bid for our sympathy she has us loving her, suffering with her, mourning her. There is something virginal about her acting: every gesture and utterance comes as a first awakening, an emergence from deep, shy reserve into daylight, exaltation, and pain.

Most of the supporting parts are at least capably handled. Even such often erratic actors as Lou Gilbert, George Mathews, and Jon Cypher give performances to be relished, and some of the briefest appearances manage to register. Equally to be commended are Robin Wagner's efficiently spare sets, David Toser's sensibly restrained costumes, John Gleason's graphic lighting, and Charles Gross's suggestively arranged musical underpinnings. Even the playwright deserves, after all, a lefthanded salute.

No such salute is due Joseph Heller's rather self-indulgent antiwar and anti-universal indifference play, *We Bombed in New Haven,* a belated foray into Pirandellism covering ideological and technical ground that is already flyspecked with footprints. While Ron Leibman and Anthony Holland give incisive performances, Jason Robards is perfunctory and Diana Sands (despite the obligatory chorus of critical acclaim any Negro actor is nowadays assured of) bad as usual. Two Pinter one-acters written for television would just manage to squeak by on stage, if only they were better performed. In *The Tea Party* (a needlessly obscure and basically empty play), Valerie French is as sexy as she is good, and John Tillinger is amusing though too un-

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menacing; but the others, with one painful exception, are only bearable. In *The Basement* (a rather more obvious and basically empty play), all three performances are shoddy. Ed Wittstein's sets, as always, perform as trickily and delightfully as trained poodles, but it is bad business for dramatic design to be outclassed by set design.

The most controversial event of the fall was The Living Theatre's limited engagement in Brooklyn, a place noted for its poor diction and turbulent streets. The Becks now practice revolutionary street theatre, and whether their offerings are based on Sophocles and Brecht, Mary Shelley, or their own and other people's improvisations, it all comes out a cross between Artaud and agit-prop, between slimy calisthenics and maniacal group therapy for performers and audience. Everyone must by now be directly or indirectly acquainted with these subverbal protest meetings against practically anything, these combination happenings and live-ins with poorly simulated sex, crudely mimed revolt, clouds of incense and pot, performers wallowing in the aisles and spectators rushing up on the stage. There is mutual heckling by actors and audience, alternating with performers imitating animals, platonic orgies, pseudonudie shows; there are swirlings, seethings, bellowings, mass possession by demons, anything but theatre. Long hours of dullness punctuated by an occasional clever stage image or an apt wisecrack from someone in the audience. How strange that so much bustle can add up to such boredom.

For a cogent, systematic, and justly severe dissection of The Living Theatre, everyone should read Eric Bentley's masterly critique in *The New York Times* of October 20. Bentley makes clear how confused and destructive the LT's politics are, how sterile their acting techniques, and how the glory of the theatre is to have risen from ritual, not to lapse back into it. My purpose here is merely to report a few typical symptoms; I undertake no complete nosography.

At the Sophocles-Brecht *Antigone,* antitranslated by Judith Malina, we hear: "As for me, I'm following the custom and burying my brother, and if they kill me for it, so what." Or: "And further, if I had left my mother's dead son lie unburied, that would have made me unhappy." Miss Malina speaks and acts these lines as execrably as the rest of the company acts and speaks, but you may be sure that they are accompanied by several actors impersonating ravening vultures to perfection. Words here are few in number and feeble in meaning, but the former is compensated for by endless repetition, the latter by frantic shouting. The Polynices of the evening, a chap who calls himself Echnaton and looks like the first syllable of that venerable name, used Unilateral Disarmament buttons to button his fly with. It is hard to say whether the cause of peace or of its near-homonym is worse served by this maneuver.

At *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* the public got a splendid chance to display its imbecility. At one point several performers squat down-

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stage facing the audience and produce a series of snorts and sneezes. The spectators respond with hurricanes of laughter and applause. During one phase of the evening, large numbers of spectators made a pilgrimage to the stage, formed an enormous circle with the performers, and proceeded to hum and sway, sway and hum. Several reviewers with reputations participated in this ritual. One young girl hobbled up on the stage on crutches. I am sorry to have to report that no miracle occurred; she had to hobble back to her seat. Rather like Lisieux, I imagine.

At *Paradise Now,* Julian Beck *en* (partial) *deshabillé* chants, "If I could drive you out of your wretched minds," and it occurs to me that the procedure here is not really therapy, not really exorcism, but, if I may coin a word, inorcism. The point is to infect as many people as possible with the demons, gripes, hatreds, foaming fits and brimming frustrations of the LT: if all become equally crazy, all will be equally sane.

Let me illustrate. At one point various voices from the stage yell out: "Fuck the Jews! Fuck the Arabs! Fuck means peace!" A spectator sagely corrects: "Fuck means a piece of arse." But note the LT's typical aggression. Is this pacification? Is this a political program? Is this comic theatre? Why should Jews or Arabs, or even hyenas in heat, submit to the embraces of the unwashed, unsightly, uncivilized, untouchable members of the LT? And, significantly, the entire ensemble now howls in chorus: "Kill! Kill! Kill!" In the name of peace, of course. And there are four-and-a-half hours of this, without intermission or even remission.

But the laughable, frightening, pathetic thing is that numerous reviewers and critics, some of them even vaguely respectable, should have taken this seriously, should have waxed enthusiastic and emitted fulsome encomia. I am glad that there is a Bentley left to call a spade a spade, but it's a Milton that should be living at this hour. Except that, struck down by the deafening torrent of mindlessness and hysteria, he too would end up a mute, inglorious Milton.

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Reviews

MARIUS BEWLEY

Modes of Poetry[1]

THE PUBLICATION OF A. R. AMMONS' *Selected Poems* should bring him wider recognition than has come on the basis of his three previously published volumes. At forty-two Ammons is one of the most accomplished writers of his generation in America. His work, both in subject matter and execution has certainty and assurance, and he possesses a creative intelligence perfectly aware of what it can do and what it ought not to try, and happily at ease within its recognized and accepted boundaries. Within those boundaries Ammons' poems speak with settled authority, and are not afraid of repeating themselves, which they often do with conviction and without monotony. In this respect he resembles Wallace Stevens a little, although in most other ways the minds of the two poets come through very differently. But as with Stevens, so with Ammons: when one begins to read him, the best way to understand one poem is to read a great many. This is usual with poets obsessed with one or two central themes in their work to which they return on every creative occasion. Once the clue to Ammons' master pattern is seized (and it is not at all difficult) his poems are unusually easy to read. Nevertheless, a reader wholly unacquainted with Ammons' poetry and coming across one or two of his poems for the first time—especially if they were from his earlier work—might understandably be a little puzzled.

Ammons is not a religious poet in the sense that Edwin Muir was, but (and I see no alternative to the word here) he *is* a mystical poet in the same sense that Whitman was in much of his best poetry. I do not apologize for invoking the word in this context. Malcolm Cowley in his distinguished introduction to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* established beyond reasonable doubt the mystical nature of the central experience of the poem, and other scholars and critics have done so as well. If in 1855 Whitman appears more of an aging Hippie than a Christian, the latter has not a monopoly of spiritual experiences in the West; and if Whitman's "mystical" insights are usually expressed in essentially homosexual imagery, that is totally beside the point. But I hasten to add that in this respect there is no affinity between Whitman and Mr. Ammons.

[1] SELECTED POEMS, by *A. R. Ammons*. Cornell University Press. $5.95. REASONS FOR MOVING, by *Mark Strand*. Atheneum. $4.50 hardcover, 1.95 paperback. LOOKING FOR JONATHAN, by *Jon Anderson*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $3.95. NIGHTWALKER AND OTHER POEMS, by *Thomas Kinsella*. Alfred A. Knopf. $4.00.

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The similarity I am trying to describe is conspicuously apparent in a poem called simply "Hymn." Ammons speaks here in the very accents and language of Whitman, addressing a cosmic God who is diffused throughout Nature, yet presumably transcends it. Anyone who doubts the similarity should begin by rereading the last half respectively of passages 5 and 45 of *Leaves of Grass,* to name only two alternatives from among many that might be indicated. Here is Ammons' "Hymn" in its entirety:

I know if I find you I will have to leave the earth
and go out
  over the sea marshes and the brant in bays
and over the hills of tall hickory
and over the crater lakes and canyons
and on up through the spheres of diminishing air
past the blackset noctilucent clouds
  where one wants to stop and look
way past all the light diffusions and bombardments
up farther than the loss of sight
  into the unseasonal undifferentiated empty stark

And I know if I find you I will have to stay with the earth
inspecting with thin tools and ground eyes
trusting the microvilli sporangia and simplest
  coelenterates
and praying for a nerve cell
with all the soul of my chemical reactions
and going right on down where the eye sees only traces

You are everywhere partial and entire
You are on the inside of everything and on the outside
I walk down the path down the hill where the sweetgum
has begun to ooze spring sap at the cut
And I see how the bark cracks and winds like no other bark
chasmal to my ant-soul running up and down
and if I find you I must go out deep into your
  far resolutions
and if I find you I must stay here with the separate leaves

As with Whitman in the magnificent concluding passage of *Leaves* where he bequeaths himself "to the dirt to grow from the grass I love," Ammons in a whole series of scattered poems contemplates his own merging with nature after death. Here is part of an early "Song":

Merging into place against a slope of trees,
I extended my arms and
took up the silence and spare leafage.
I lost my head first, the cervical meat

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clumping off in rot,
baring the spinal heart to wind and ice
which work fast.
The environment lost no self-possession.

And as Whitman assumed the role of priest and guardian to all men in *Leaves* ("Let the physician and the priest go home;" "By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole weight upon me"), so Ammons becomes the same kind of guardian, addressing the sleeping men and women of the hill villages:

Now close your eyes
Sleep
Shut out the world from the dark sweet freshening
of your quiet hearts
Lie loose in the deep waters
Do not be afraid to
give yourselves up to drowning in undefended rest

If a dust storm blows up out of the west I will run
down the mountain and go through all the homes
and wake you up

If a new fire appears in the sky I will let you know
in time so you can know it should it claim you

I will have all your beings in mind burning like a watchfire
and when the night has grown thin and weak
and the full coyotes have given up their calls

I will move up close to the eternal and
saying nine praises
commend you to it and to the coming sun

There are moments when Whitman's influence is strong enough to make Ammons' poetry seem somewhat imitative, yet this is by no means the overall impression left by his work. Usually Ammons transmutes the influence into an original strength and idiom, and I should point out that to enforce my argument I have cited passages in which the Whitman influence is particularly strong—perhaps once or twice not perfectly assimilated. The affinity of the two men seems to exist primarily in their respective views of Nature, and also (related to that) in sharing an Emersonian view of Divinity, which view seems almost as pervasive throughout Ammons' poetry as Whitman's. The essence of Emerson's view of Divinity is, I suppose, expressed most succinctly in his poem "Brahma." In "What This Mode of Motion Said" Ammons writes an extended variation on Emerson's poem.

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"This Mode of Motion" is, I take it, the Divine Flux flowing through the universe, related to Emerson's Over-Soul and to the transcendent One, reconciler of all contradictions:

You will someday
Try to prove me wrong
(I am the wings when you me fly)
to replace me with some mode
you made
and think is right:

I am the way by
which you prove me
wrong,
the reason you
reason against me:

I change shape,
turn easily into the shapes you make
and even you
in moving
I leave, betray.

In presenting this brief summary of the central preoccupations of Ammons' poetry I am concerned not to give the impression that his work is merely a reflection of what has been thought and said in an earlier American tradition. I have already remarked that a reader new to these poems might be somewhat bewildered by them and think they meant nothing at all. Here is a poem that should illustrate how little indebted either to Whitman or Emerson, either in thought or technique, Ammons' poetry on the surface usually appears to be. "Mountain Liar," which has to be quoted in its entirety here, is characteristic of Ammons' earlier manner:

The mountains said they were
tired of lying down
and wanted to know what
I could do about
getting them off the ground

Well close your eyes I said
and I'll see if I can
by seeing into your nature
tell where you've been wronged
What do you think you want to do
They said Oh fly

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My hands are old
    and crippled keep no lyre
but if that is your true desire
    and conforms roughly
with your nature I said
    I don't see why
we shouldn't try
    to see something along that line

Hurry they said and snapped shut
    with rocky sounds their eyes
I closed mine and sure enough
    the whole range flew
gliding on interstellar ice

They shrieked with joy and peeked
    as if to see below
but saw me as before there
    foolish without my lyre
We haven't budged they said
    You wood

Because of its imagery, action, and charming apparent nonsense, this poem would not really look out of place in *Harmonium*. Furthermore, its meaning would be perfectly congenial in that context for this is a poem about the relation between imagination and reality. It is, of course, basically Emersonian in what it says; and although one gathers Wallace Stevens was no admirer of Emerson, from some points of view there is an astonishingly Emersonian facet to his mind. There are many passages from Emerson's essays that might illuminate "Mountain Liar," but I choose this one from *Nature*, which might almost have been written as an explanatory comment on Ammons' poem:

> [The poet] unfixes the land and the sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought, and disposes them anew. Possessed himself by a heroic passion, he uses matter as symbols of it. The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts. The one esteems nature as rooted and fast; the other as fluid, and impresses his being thereon. To him the refractory world is ductile and flexible; he invests dusts and stones with humanity, and makes them the words of the Reason. The Imagination may be defined to be the use which the Reason makes of the material world.

It is only when the poet ceases to have faith in the re-creative and sustaining power of his imagination—the moment when the moun-

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tains look down and see him standing below with no lyre in his hand—that they fall back to earth and in their frustration address him, "You wood," because he has conformed his thought to things.

Ammons has many poems like "Mountain Liar" which, on first reading, may appear to be the product of an irrational imagination, built of images and feelings so subjective and private that they can communicate only with the poet himself. But the most "obscure" poems written in the mode of "Mountain Liar" become totally intelligible at the cost of very little effort. The imagination behind them is ordered and rational and their images and symbols refer to realities by no means restricted to the poet's world of subjective experience.

There are, however, many young American poets now writing who employ a mode which, if it superficially resembles that of "Mountain Liar" in certain respects, proves to be on closer inspection truly irrational and subjective, and which requires an entirely different kind of discipline in reading, and which offers an entirely different kind of satisfaction. The risks of this kind of poetry are hazardous. To write an effective poem grounded in the subjective and irrational that is capable of genuinely communicating with a reader, calls for a talent and tact in excess of what the majority of practitioners in this manner commonly possess. In using the terms "irrational" and "subjective" in this context, I am borrowing from Mr. Donald Hall who, in his introduction to *Contemporary American Poetry* a few years ago, found them to characterize much of our poetry of the past fifteen years or so. The irrational imagination responsible for this kind of poetry, he went on to say in a highly useful formulation, "reveals through images a subjective life which is *general,* and which corresponds to an old objective life of shared experience and knowledge." Although Mr. Hall was speaking principally of poets like Robert Bly and Louis Simpson, his terms are flexible enough to permit their application to poets of considerably deeper irrational colouring; and indeed I should not know how to talk about the work of poets like Mark Strand except in some such terms as these.

At thirty-four, *Reasons for Moving* is Mr. Strand's second collection, and it exhibits those qualities of subjectivity and irrationality of which we have been speaking. He appears to me a better poet than most who write in this style, and there are several undoubted successes in his volume: there are also some undoubted failures. I should like to consider one of each for the sake of comparing the rewards and losses likely to wait on this kind of poetry. His virtues as a poet are perfectly exemplified in "The Man in the Tree," a poem whose rather ghostly visual beauty is heightened by the soft rhythmical modulations of a number of the lines:

> I sat in the cold limbs of a tree.
> I wore no clothes and the wind was blowing.
> You stood below in a heavy coat,
> the coat you are wearing.

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And when you opened it, baring your chest,
white moths flew out, and whatever you said
at that moment fell quietly onto the ground,
the ground at your feet.

Snow floated down from the clouds into my ears.
The moths from your coat flew into the snow.
And the wind as it moved under my arms, under my chin,
whined like a child.

I shall never know why
our lives took a turn for the worse, nor will you.
Clouds sank into my arms and my arms rose.
They are rising now.

I sway in the white air of winter
and the starling's cry lies down on my skin.
A field of ferns covers my glasses; I wipe them away
in order to see you.

I turn and the tree turns with me.
Things are not only themselves in this light.
You close your eyes and your coat
falls from your shoulders,

the tree withdraws its hand,
the wind fits into my breath, yet nothing is certain.
The poem that has stolen these words from my mouth
may not be this poem.

It would be disastrous to attempt a detailed logical exegesis of this, line by line and image by image, for in Donald Hall's phrase, this kind of imagination is irrational. Yet it would be a poor reader who felt any large margin of unintelligibility here. If the poet's statement is profoundly subjective (again following Hall) it reflects a subjective life which is *general:* that is, if these images are private they nonetheless find their corresponding reflections in the hidden inwardness of most men. The poet ensconced at an altitude in the living but frozen tree, the heavily coated woman on the ground below, establish the polarity of a human relation that cannot sustain its life. In a delicate and dream-like way all the images of whiteness, cold, and fragility—the falling snow, the white moths, the frost ferns that darken the poet's vision, the whining wind—create the spiritual and emotional weather in which this human defeat is played out. Then the poem goes beyond the human occasion in the last two fine stanzas to face the epistemological and ontological implications of living and feeling in a world where neither knowledge nor being is certain. The

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poem is subjective and inward without holding its meaning incommunicado. It is "irrational" in the sense that everything that happens in it, including its images, refer to nothing at all in any world of thought or logic, as Mr. Ammons' flying mountains refer back to a philosophical conception of the imagination and its relation to reality. Nevertheless, it does evoke in the reader's private heart correspondent feelings, and in this exquisitely established correspondence the poem achieves its meaning and its integrity as a work of art.

"The Man in the Tree" seems to me an entirely successful poem. By contrast, "The Man in Black," an attempt in the same mode, seems to me as clearly a failure:

> I was walking downtown
> when I noticed a man in black,
> black cape and black boots, coming towards me.
>
> His arms out in front of him,
> his fingers twinkling with little rings,
> he looked like a summer night full of stars.
>
> It was summer. The night was full of stars.
> The tall buildings formed a hallway down which I walked.
> The man in black came towards me.
>
> The waxed tip of his mustace shone
> like tiny spears and his teeth glistened.
> I offered him my hand which he did not take.
>
> I felt like a fool and stood in his black wake,
> shaken and small, and my tears
> swung back and forth in the sultry air like chandeliers.

Here, the subjectivity that governs the poem appears excessive. The images, if not as "irrational" as in the first poem, are irresponsible. The poem seems to be about another frustrated human relationship, but here the similarities between the two cease. The meaning of "The Man in the Tree" lives in its images, but no number of readings will clear this poem up. A friend whose opinion I consulted felt that it should be titled, "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." Now I do not for a moment suppose that Mr. Strand meant to write a poem about the tribulations of cruising on Third Avenue. Interpreted so, the poem is grotesque and ridiculous, and had he deliberately chosen such a subject he would have done better than this. But the proposed title remains so richly applicable to what is actually on the page that it is almost impossible to dislodge it. I am presuming that this poem does indeed represent a subjective experience of some kind for Mr. Strand, but it is an experience that

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remains wholly private and enclosed, inaccessible to the reader and hence unintelligible except as a somewhat showily staged "happening." There is a failure to discover images or symbols capable of evoking feelings in the reader to correspond with any felt reality at the heart of the poem, and so it leaves one with a sense of its hollowness.

Another young poet drawing on the "irrational imagination" with varying degrees of success or failure is Jon Anderson whose first collection, *Looking for Jonathan,* has just appeared. As with Mark Strand, Mr. Anderson is concerned with the predicament of human relations, but even more so with the corollary problem of discovering and sustaining a knowledge of one's own essential and deepest identity. These two related problems have been stock-in-trade with American poets for a long time, but they were not the first to be concerned. Matthew Arnold was digging in the same literary areas as long ago as 1852 in "The Buried Life," and making very similar discoveries. These questions become insistent in periods of intellectual uncertainty, and make their presence felt in the poetry of the time.

Looking for Jonathan celebrates in its very name this quest for the "buried life"—for the essential meaning of self and experience. The title poem is by no means the best—indeed it is not even characteristic of Anderson's manner in general; but it is young and engaging nevertheless, and it has the advantage of indicating the kind of problems that will concern him in his sometimes bafflingly subjective verse. Jonathan arises early one allegorical morning, before sunrise, and says to himself: "Whatever troubles you,/leave it." Then he fares forth into the morning fields, obviously with a goal in view. As he jogs along,

> Non-Fiction, happiest man, ran alongside,
> then right-angled "See you—"
> into the white woods.
> We followed, of course, on foot.

So far: charming. Non-Fiction is the briskest personification I've met lately. But like all of Mr. Anderson's poems, this is short, and Jonathan arrives at his shining centre, the point of No-More-Illusions, sooner than one could reasonably have expected:

> I could see
> the orange home town, coming.
> I leaned honestly
> into my own reflection.
> I had no more stories of God.

The poem is attractive because of its bright simplicity of language and approach, but its achievement is somewhat smaller than its con-

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cluding announcement. Those poems in which Mr. Anderson endeavours to find a speech in which to explore the subjective and irrational aspects of experience raise other problems. Several of these poems are quite successful; but more collapse into monotony and non-communicativeness. Of the latter class, "Totem" is representative. The private inner world into which it plunges us is so private, so unrelated to any formal frame or scale of significances grounded outside the poet's subjective feelings that one is only bored:

I am gliding amidst
foghorns and in a dream.
Oars lock in my high
secretive skull; I
drift between doors
into the flooded dark.
Here is the home
of nighthawks and owls.
A massive protection
opens in my head—
indoor afternoons:
the house smelled of
dampness, the shadow
of the piano reached
across the living
room. *Mom's*
gone upstairs.

No great injustice is done by quoting only the middle passage for the poem possesses no real structure, and for anyone but the poet, no meaning. The language here is simple and direct, and some would probably add, "immediate": certainly it is neither academic nor literary. But its flame of life flickers very low. It is quite otherwise with another of Anderson's poems, "Voyage," which is the best in the volume. He has evolved for this poem a language and imagery remarkable for their assured tentativeness and precision of focus, capable of X-raying in simplest luminous words the growth and fruition in perfect mutual understanding and affection of a friendship between two men. It is a beautiful achievement of subtle definition in which, through the symbolic images of a voyage, water, receding land, and great stones burrowing into the sea, the most delicate and impalpable modulations of private feeling are given the permanence and clarity of cleanly sculptured stone bathed in light. The poem is too much of a piece to be violated by fragmentary quotation, but it certainly does not belong with "Totem," for if, in the sense in which we have been using the words, it is "irrational" and "subjective," its language is of that kind which opens up "a subjective life which is *general.*"

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The qualities of the several poets I have talked about here seem rather insistently American to me. The task of discovering criteria by which to distinguish British from American poetry is hopelessly difficult, but it makes an interesting game. I can easily imagine a reader supposing poems by Charles Tomlinson to have been written by an American: I cannot think such a mistake could be made in respect to the work of Philip Larkin or D. J. Enright. On the other hand, in their obsessive fascination with two or three abstract ideas as the heart and soul of their poems, Stevens and Ammons could scarcely be anything but American. In short, it seems to me that American poets tend to work their way into experience by way of an interest in technique and in the craft of poetry as such, while English poets tend to relieve the pressures of lived experiences through the cultivation of craft. The point from which a poet begins must necessarily make a difference in the character and quality of the product achieved, and shaky as it no doubt is, I think such a consideration of this might serve as well as any other to explain certain differences between the two bodies of literature.

Reading the new collection of Thomas Kinsella's poetry, *Nightwalker and Other Poems,* I was struck by certain differences between this and the other volumes I have spoken of. In a good deal of American verse the note of inevitability frequently seems lacking because the poems appear less to evolve organically from deep experience or from the poet's life-continuum than to be constructed from deliberately selected images and ideas for the sake of exploiting the possibilities of language effects. There is no need to argue the merits and demerits of either mode here. I merely want to point out that in Kinsella's case the poem is totally immersed in a pre-existing vision of life, in an emotion generated through the ordeal of living. This is something entirely different from the pursuit of the subjective which, in the sense it has been used here, is nothing more than a conscious literary strategy. Kinsella is an immensely accomplished poet, in perfect control of his craft; but in reading him it is the impact of the experience in his poems that moves one rather than the technique of them, though it is, naturally, only through the technique that the experience becomes available. I can fancy that the grub in his very short poem, "Leaf-Eater," throws a certain light on his creative processes:

> On a shrub in the heart of the garden,
> On an outer leaf, a grub twists
> Half its body, a tendril,
> This way and that in blind
> Space: no leaf or twig
> Anywhere in reach; then gropes
> Back on itself and begins
> To eat its own leaf.

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For some decades American poetry has been going through a period of great brilliance. The fact is undeniable, yet—and Kinsella's grub raises the question—may it not turn out to be Hawthorne's mechanical butterfly in the end?

Thomas Kinsella is one of Ireland's two or three most important poets, though his poetry is no more obviously Irish than that of Denis Devlin. For the past year or two he has been teaching English at Southern Illinois University, and the present volume is not a new work but a selection from his poems since 1961. The volume falls roughly into two parts: poems dealing with the ordeal of experience, and several longer poems that present an austerely critical and satiric view of contemporary Ireland. A sequence of poems called *Wormwood,* reprinted in this volume, is probably his best known and most distinguished work. There will be no space to discuss these poems here, but I should like to quote the Prologue of the sequence, which states in prose of remarkable beauty the moral vision—the resignation to and acceptance of ordeal—out of which his poetry evolves:

> Beloved,
>
> A little of what we have found . . .
>
> It is certain that maturity and peace are to be sought through ordeal after ordeal, and it seems that the search continues until we fail. We reach out after each new beginning, penetrating our context to know ourselves, and our knowledge increases until we recognize again (more profoundly each time) our pain, indignity, and triviality. This bitter cup is offered, heaped with curses, and we must drink or die. And even though we drink we may also die, if every drop of bitterness—that rots the flesh—is not transmuted. (Certainly the individual plight is hideous, each torturing each, but we are guilty, seeing this, to believe that our common plight is only hideous. Believing so, we make it so: pigs in a slaughter-yard that turn and savage each other in a common desperation and disorder.) Death, either way, is guilt and failure. But if we drink the bitterness and can transmute it and continue, we resume in candour and doubt the only individual joy—the restored necessity to learn. Sensing a wider scope, a more penetrating harmony, we begin again in a higher innonce to grow toward the next ordeal.

This is the earned insight which nourishes Kinsella's poetry, and it exists there not as an abstraction first trapped and caged by craft and technique, but as the living fruit of life endured and finally accepted. While it is impossible to consider here the individual poems of *Wormwood,* perhaps some slight indication of how this life-view moulds his poetry can be given by quoting from an earlier poem, "Ballydavid Pier":

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Noon. The luminous tide
Climbs through the heat, covering
Grey shingle. A film of scum
Searches first among litter,
Cloudy with (I remember)
Life; then crystal-clear shallows
Cool on the stones, silent
With shells and claws, white fish bones;
Farther out a bag of flesh,
Foetus of goat or sheep,
Wavers below the surface.

Small monster of true flesh
Brought forth somewhere
In bloody confusion and error
And flung into bitterness,
Blood washed white:
Does that structure satisfy?
The ghost tissue hangs unresisting
In allegorical waters,
Lost in self-search
—A swollen blind brow
Humbly crumpled over
Budding limbs, unshaken
By the spasms of birth or death.

The Angelus. Faint bell-notes
From some church in the distance
Tremble over the water.
It is nothing. The vacant harbour
Is filling; it will empty.
The misbirth touches the surface
And glistens like quicksilver.

No one, I think will be inclined to questions the technical competence and discipline of this poem, but our sense of its achievement on this plane is absorbed in the unnerving shock of that terrifying juxtaposition: "a bag of flesh,/Foetus of goat or sheep," floating near the surface of the harbour while, in the distance, the Angelus, commemorating the Incarnation and birth of Christ, faintly sounds. I cannot think of a short passage of poetry in which so many complex and tangled emotions find such concentrated expression: horror and beauty, pity, terror—all resolved at last through an acceptance in love. Poetry can begin with craft and technique and move towards experience; but the kind of experience incorporated in a poem like this is beyond the springes and nets of both.

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PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Eminent Edwardian?

MR. MICHAEL HOLROYD'S BIOGRAPHY OF Lytton Strachey[1] is one of those bad books which are much more interesting than many better books. It is a bad book because it is devoid of analytical intelligence, so that it misses the true interest of its subject, and because it lacks courage. It is intensely interesting, none the less, because it provides a great deal of information through which the true interest of the subject can be perceived, in spite of the book itself, and because that interest is real and great. What the book ought to be concerned with is the decline and fall of the ruling class of a great people, as mirrored in the character and achievements of one individual; but this its author does not seem to understand, so that his book, concerned only with Strachey's personal relationships and his writings, falls to *their* level of interest—which is not high. For Strachey was a shallow person, and his writings were shallow.

But if Mr. Holroyd had been more perceptive and more courageous, he would have seen that his subject was engaging him in three topics of real interest. First, the effect on the English ruling class of the kind of education which it devised for its young males; second, the cultural power of a homosexual élite within that class; third, the effect on the whole structure of the outbreak of war in 1914 and the four and a half years of slaughter which followed.

The centrality of the first topic is one which no reader of English biographies and autobiographies can have failed to observe. It was classically formulated by Gibbon in his autobiography:

> . . . There is not in the course of life a more remarkable change than the removal of a child from the luxury and freedom of a wealthy house to the frugal diet and strict subordination of a school, from the tenderness of parents and the obsequiousness of servants to the rude familiarity of his equals, the insolent tyranny of his seniors, and the rod, perhaps, of a cruel and capricious pedagogue . . .

—and if you want to see it further documented, you are referred to the lives of Coleridge, Shelley, Thackeray, the Victorian philanthropist Shaftesbury and historian Froude, the painter C. R. W. Nevinson, C. S. Lewis, George Orwell, Cyril Connolly, and other witnesses

[1] LYTTON STRACHEY, by *Michael Holroyd*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 2 vols., $21.95 the set.

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innumerable. What they all describe was a form of training by ordeal. Its nearest historical parallel was perhaps the education of the young Spartans; indeed, a celebrated Scottish school of this kind boasts for its motto *Spartam nanctus es; hanc exorna* ("you've got yourself into Sparta; now be a credit to her"); and its object was the training of a ruling class to administer an Empire. This object it fulfilled with great success, producing a unique breed of men, whose peculiar characteristics—a stiff-backed inarticulate dutifulness, a standard never surpassed in such matters as freedom from corruption and cruelty combined with a basic remoteness from the peoples they ruled—found their poet in Kipling and their critic in Forster, and received from the rest of the world a mixture of irritation, amusement, and reluctant admiration. The breed was produced—as all such breeds must be—at the cost of immense suffering and permanent damage to those individuals who did not "fit." That meant virtually all of those gifted for the arts and the life of the mind. Among them, naturally, was Lytton Strachey. He was sent to a boarding-school for boys founded and run by a crackpot who in his latter years campaigned fervently against CAPITAL LETTERS and insisted on calling himself dr cecil reddie; but this crackpot was at least more honest than most in acknowledging the real object of his school. "Education," he said, "is Empire"; and to train his future praetors and pro-consuls he subjected them to cold baths in winter, beatings of the little boys by the big boys, and public floggings administered by dr reddie himself—"awful and solemn ceremonies which impressed themselves for life on the more sensitive boys."

That Strachey was very unhappy under this regime, and that it seriously damaged his health (possibly for life—certainly he was never thereafter really well), may be taken for granted. That is the price you pay for Empire, if you happen to belong to its ruling class but don't "fit" in it. And one might argue that the price is worth paying—if you believe in the Empire and if the Empire is going to last. But the paradox of Strachey's situation, which was also that of his type and generation (he was born in 1880), was that the Empire for which their tougher brothers were trained and they themselves sacrificed, was in fact nearing its end—was going to dissolve with extraordinary rapidity, and was going to do so largely through their own efforts. For there was always a powerful anti-imperialist sentiment among the English intelligentsia—one can see it as early as Pope and Dr. Johnson—and what happened in the twentieth century, quite simply, is that this sentiment won. The English ceased to believe that they *ought* to be ruling an Empire. It was this—this failure of will or crisis of conscience, as you like—far more than all the Gandhis and Nkrumahs, that ended the Empire: a process which, now it has been achieved, looks sadly different from what had been hoped of it. I speak as one who himself, when we had an Empire,

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disliked and opposed it; but when one looks now at the facts of its aftermath, it is hard not to feel some twinges of doubt. War and massacre in India and Pakistan, and now in Nigeria, and in many other lands which have never reached the headlines—in Zanzibar, among the Nagas on the Indo-Burma frontier, among the Negroes in the Southern Sudan: has it really been a gain for the common people? But such, it seems, is everywhere the grim consequence of the ending of Europe's power over Asia and Africa: or else another consequence perhaps even grimmer, certainly more ironic, the beginnings of American empire. And I suppose it is a matter of plain provable fact that the French, in fifty years of imperially ruling Indo-China, caused its people and its land less suffering, less death and torture, than the Americans have caused to a part of it in five years (so far) of saving and liberating. . . .

But back to Strachey. What happened to him, and to his generation, was that the grand object for which they had been trained, or against which they fiercely reacted (it makes little psychological difference which), simply vanished. You were then liable to find, if you were one of those who reacted, that there was a large part of you which essentially missed and regretted the idol you had helped to destroy. Strachey himself did not find this, since he died in 1932, while the Empire, to all appearances, was still intact. He certainly would have found it, had he lived to the 1960's. For his own situation was peculiarly illustrative of this ambivalence. His family, the Stracheys, were a notable clan of Empire-builders, with a long tradition of service to India; and Lytton, it is clear, deeply admired them, and probably (without quite knowing it) envied and longed to emulate them. It is significant that his first work of history was an ardent defence of Warren Hastings' rule in India. The psychology is pretty clear. If you are sent to a little Sparta dedicated to the production of pro-consuls through a system of rigorous physical ordeal, and if your own body fails under this ordeal, then your intelligence will try to restore your self-esteem by jeering at the "hearties" whose stronger bodies succeed—and subsequently at the Empire they rule—but your body will never forgive itself for failing and will never cease to envy, admire, and perhaps love, the bodies which did not fail. This is the pattern which Strachey's sexual life was always to follow.

For the great oddity about this educational system, considered in relation to the society which created it and in the middle of which it existed, was that it was in all respects designed as if its prime *intention* was to foster erotic relations between boys and boys, and between men and boys—in many such schools, including Strachey's, the majority of the masters were unmarried, and encouraged to remain so—yet society as a whole, outside the schools, regarded such homosexuality with ferocious and hysterical disapproval. The ancient

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Spartans were wiser and more honest than that; they recognised and applauded the man-boy or big boy-little boy passions which such a system was emotionally built on. But this, until quite lately, was the best kept, universally known secret of English society. Not many years ago, I contributed an article to an English periodical in which I remarked that if the cultural history of 20th-century England were ever honestly related, it would be said that the biggest unadmitted fact of that history was the dominance of English culture by upper-class homosexuals. That remark was not printed, and I was not again asked to contribute to that periodical. Its truth (everyone knew it anyway—I was no miracle of perceptiveness) is now coming out, as the veterans die off and the memoirs and letters appear in a climate of greater frankness. The contrast is comic between this biography of Strachey and the official biography of Maynard Keynes which came out a few years ago. No innocent reader could possibly have guessed from the latter what is copiously documented in Holroyd, that Keynes was a lifelong practising homosexual passionately involved with Strachey either as lover or rival. Another recent work, which displays the Victorian roots of this homosexual Establishment, is Phyllis Grosskurth's *The Woeful Victorian,* a biography of John Addington Symonds; and the 1970's, I prophesy, are going to see many other such confirmations and revelations. Mr. Holroyd himself is either too naive or too discreet to point this out; but anyone with any knowledge of the recent English literary scene can pick out the weaving of the web, as "Lytton" introduces the "charming, fair-haired" young So-and-so, soon to be Fellow of Such-and-such College, to younger Who's It, who becomes chief reviewer for the Sunday Thingmajig, and later brings along the younger still You Know, future editor of That Magazine. . . .

And so on. But the question is: does it matter? And if so, why? What, if anything, is wrong here? The thing which is (I would like to be able to say *was,* but I doubt if I can) wrong here is not the homosexuality, but the upper-classness. This homosexual Establishment is closely tied in with the expensive and therefore socially exclusive boarding-schools for boys, and with the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which also used to be (but they *have* changed) expensive and exclusive. Indeed, the ties were often much narrower and more precise. No one can fail to note, for example, in Mr. Holroyd's book, the recurrence of Eton and King's College, Cambridge. (Mr. Holroyd, I note from the publisher's blurb, himself went to Eton: which fact I cite with no personal implications, but I suspect it may account for his patent inability to stand back and really *judge* this society from without.) As such educational institutions are extremely prestigious—and, of course, contain a high proportion of the best brains of the country—it follows that those who dominate them are in a very fair way to dominate the country. Which indeed, in certain sectors, they have: still do, perhaps, in spite of Mr. Harold Wilson.

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So one thing that is wrong with it is this very unattractive anomaly: they pretend to be art-loving idealists surrounded by the hordes of Philistia, and devoted slaves of Eros Paedophilia continually in danger of martyrdom by cruel heterosexual Puritans—but they are also, and all the time, ardent and favored worshippers of the Bitch Goddess Success. At the gentle art of "Making It," these graceful English amateurs could run rings round simple, hard-working, upward-striving Podhoretz. This is another thing very clear from the facts of Mr. Holroyd's book, which its author seems beatifically unaware of. What delightful country-houses Lytton and the rest of them always seemed to find! What devoted retainers always seemed to "go with" these houses! What aunts or uncles were always turning up at crises, to find you a villa on the Riviera or pay for you to have a rest-cure in Sweden! It all rested, of course, on two things: private incomes, and low-paid servants.

But that, it may be said, had nothing to do with homosexuality: that was the basis of all Edwardian culture. True: but the homosexual Establishment seems to have been class-conscious in a less visible but, I suspect, more harmful way. One of the most curious features of Mr. Holroyd's book is a running commentary by way of footnotes from Lytton's brother James, who survived him long enough to read Mr. Holroyd's work in typescript. James is highly, and most amusingly, indignant at Holroyd for his lack of frankness in describing sexual behavior. At one point, he explodes at him in this style: "This is a good example of your unceasing desire to run Lytton down—in this case to make people think he was impotent—which, believe me, he wasn't." This protest—from one who certainly knew—seems in a way to contradict a later passage, in which Mr. Holroyd argues, without giving his evidence, that the sexual lives of Strachey and Keynes were a good deal less physical than one would naturally conclude from the words in their letters.

> A special glossary is really required in order to reduce to some verisimilitude the actual meanings of the words so freely employed. To "propose" would seem to indicate little more than the slight ambiguous pressure of one hand upon another; to "rape" or even to "bugger" usually means a peck on the cheek, or a dubious embrace.

The contradiction is to be resolved, I suspect, by assuming that Strachey followed the practice very common in his class and type: he was sentimental, ecstatic, quasi-platonic with men or boys of his own class, and thoroughly physical only with members of what he himself called the "lower classes." This was the case with Oscar Wilde and J. A. Symonds, and it seems hinted at in Holroyd's book by frequent coy references to Strachey's being "disturbed" or "sent into a flutter"

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by handsome lift-boys, waiters, gondoliers, and Swedish sailors ("with their décolleté necks"). These self-styled enlightened homosexuals were in fact no more enlightened than their heterosexual ancestors, whose morality they were exactly reproducing: screw the shop-girls and housemaids, but only "flirt" with your sisters' friends. Mr. Holroyd is totally inexplicit in describing this side of Strachey's life, as he is also in describing the pornographic and scatological stories and verses which Strachey wrote incessantly but never published. James Strachey explodes at him again over this:

> The impression you give of holding up your hands in shocked horror at their fearful obscenity makes me wonder whether you've ever comes across a young human being . . . When I read these passages I wonder why on earth you ever set out to write this book —and I feel inclined to want the whole thing thrown out of the window. . . .

This comment is entirely justified. In the age of Burroughs and Genet, Mr. Holroyd seems ridiculously reticent; his book is quite undeserving of the praise of "exemplary frankness" which one English reviewer bestowed on it.

The effect of such prudery is unfortunate for his hero. For because, if I may put it with a plainness which would sadly upset Mr. Holroyd's Old Etonian sensibilities, we are never allowed to know what Strachey really did and with whom—whether he buggered or was buggered, indulged in mutual masturbation and so on—we get a depressing impression (wrong though it certainly is) as of a quasi-impotent *voyeur,* of someone endlessly, obsessively dreaming, talking, writing about sex, but hardly ever, completely, *doing* it. This impression is enhanced when one sees the huge importance attached in Strachey's circle to *gossip.* "He told me shocking gossip about everyone . . . he would gossip brilliantly and maliciously . . . from Friday night to Sunday night they swapped a mixture of analysis, gossip, scandal, and advice . . . the talk of psycho-analysis and masturbation, of jealousy, inquisitiveness, the prevalence of homosexuality, the peculiarities of their friends' love-affairs . . . encouraged him to recount many fond and naughty stories about Leonard Woolf. . . ." D. H. Lawrence's comment on that is the final one: "To hear these young people talk fills me with black fury: they talk endlessly—and never, never a good thing said. They are cased each in a hard little shell of his own and out of this they talk words."

Gossip, gossip, gossip all the time: gossip, giggle, and gush. The psychological level at which these allegedly very clever, and certainly very successful, men conducted their emotional lives reminds one of a bunch of school-girls in a prep school dormitory. Here is Lytton on a young mountaineer, later Robert Graves's schoolmaster and later still killed near the summit of Mount Everest:

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> Mon dieu!—George Mallory!—When that's been written, what more need be said? My hand trembles, my heart palpitates, my whole being swoons away at the words—oh heavens! heavens! I found of course that he'd been absurdly maligned—he's six foot high, with the body of an athlete by Praxiteles, and a face—oh incredible—the mystery of Botticelli, the refinement and delicacy of a Chinese print, the youth and piquancy of an unimaginable English boy. I rave, but when you see him, as you must, you will admit all—all!

There is no doubt of the sincerity of this: indeed, I found that almost the only redeeming feature of Strachey's character was the complete genuineness of his loves. He was, unquestionably, a passionate, suffering creature; but it was all flawed, somehow, by this immaturity. Immaturity—a state of permanent adolescence—would have to be the final verdict. Is a degree of that inherent in the homosexual condition—a consequence of the fact that it can never lead to the normal responsibilities of family and parenthood? Probably it is: but not always, surely, to this extent. If one looks across the Channel at the French literary scene in the same epoch, it is impossible not to feel that Proust and Gide and the rest achieved a seriousness and maturity in their work which their English compeers never came within a mile of: and the reason may be partly the greater tolerance of French laws and society—so that homosexuals in France were never tempted to fancy themselves martyrs—but more importantly, I would say, the fact that French literary homosexuality never seems to have been an Establishment, in the sense of being also a social and educational élite. It may be significant that Strachey found himself "bored" with Proust's work: yet it should have interested him, for there is a sense in which *A la recherche du temps perdu* might be called the gossip of a snobbish homosexual, but it is gossip distilled and sublimated in its passage through an adult mind passionately serious about art and morality. That was what Strachey and his circle could never make out of *their* gossip.

The life of Strachey, and of all his generation, was savagely slashed across by the opening of a huge crevasse they had never dreamed of: August, 1914. There is a book to be written—the materials for it are coming out now, and Mr. Holroyd's book will be part of them—on the effects of the first war on the society of England. It is not always realized just how appalling was the destruction of the educated young in that time. Pound's words—"There died a myriad; and of the best, among them"—are no rhetoric. They are simple fact. The school I myself went to—the Edinburgh Academy, an old school in the Scottish day-school tradition—gives in its school magazine, as is common, extracts from its own issues twenty-five, fifty, a hundred years ago. In 1964, it gave one extract from its issue of Summer, 1914. It listed

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the names of that year's cricket team. A cricket team has eleven players. Three years later, of those eleven boys eight were dead and all the others wounded. It is true, of course, that France and Germany suffered as heavily. But the shock was not so shattering; for in those countries universal conscription had existed for many years, and the experience of total war was neither unknown nor unexpected. The English had never had conscription, and had never known total war. For centuries their wars had been fought by small professional armies, and fought on foreign soil. From the frightful blood-letting which succeeded that immunity, English society has never, in my judgment, recovered—and never will, until it has changed itself far more radically than it shows any signs of doing so far. Lawrence, again, understood that, with a depth of comprehension no one else has attained to:

> So it seemed to her everywhere. The colliers at Tevershall were talking again of a strike, and it seemed to Connie there again it was not a manifestation of energy, it was the bruise of the war that had been in abeyance, slowly rising to the surface and creating the great ache of unrest, and stupor of discontent. The bruise was deep, deep, deep . . . the bruise of the false inhuman war. It would take many years for the living blood of the generations to dissolve the vast black clot of bruised blood, deep inside their souls and bodies. And it would need a new hope.

To this dreadful disaster the response of Strachey and his circle was quite simple. They did their best to turn their backs on it. Strachey himself claimed to be a "conscientious objector," and this claim was doubtless sincere in a way; but its sincerity was compromised by the fact that he was physically quite unfit for active service of any sort. He recognised this with great clarity in a letter to brother James:

> As for our personal position, it seems to me quite sound and coherent. We're all far too weak physically to be of any use at all. If we weren't we'd still be too intelligent to be thrown away in some really not essential expedition . . . God has put us on an island, and Winston has given us a navy, and it would be absurd to neglect these advantages—which I consider exactly apply to able-bodied intellectuals. It's no good pretending one isn't a special case.

Successive medical boards admitted the truth of this. The first of such examinations shows Strachey at his most contemptible:

> It was queer finding oneself with four members of the lower classes —filthy dirty—crammed behind a screen in the corner of a room,

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> and told to undress. For a few moments I realised what it was like to *be* one of the lower classes—the appalling indignity of it! To come out after it was all over, and find oneself being called "sir" by policemen and ticket collectors was a distinct satisfaction.

Later (he had to report every so often to ensure that his body was still sufficiently unfit) things went rather better: "As it turned out, the result of this medical board was very satisfactory, and he was declared to be permanently and totally unfit for all forms of military service. 'It is a great relief,' he wrote to Ottoline. . . ."

This "satisfactory" position having been reached, the Strachey circle was able to relax:

> In the neighbourhood of Lewes, and beneath the northern slopes of the South Downs, Charleston provided a permanent country home for these Bloomsbury non-combatants, where they could peaceably discharge their wartime obligations under the Military Service Act.

("Discharge their wartime obligations" meant that they played genteelly at being rough-handed tillers of the soil.)

Now one may feel—as I do—that the war of 1914-1918 was an unforgivable, unatoneable crime; and yet feel also that behavior of this kind both revealed, and increased, a repulsive depth of selfishness and vanity. The active opposition of Bertrand Russell (who lost his Cambridge fellowship and went to prison for his pacifist work) is worthy of respect; but it is not only impossible to respect *this* behavior, it is also hard to imagine that Strachey respected himself. For we are back again in dr reddie's school; Strachey's body has failed the ordeal again; and is it possible to imagine that he was *deeply* "satisfied" when his body was pronounced "permanently and totally unfit" and that he was not, once again, bitterly humiliated, as he looked at the strong bodies which were good enough to die? He could not admit this to himself; he had to pretend to feel superior to these smelly wretches of the "lower classes" as they went to their malodorous doom: but who can doubt that what he really felt was far more complex—was much closer to that tortured mixture of envy and grief with which another (but less egoistic) homosexual, A. E. Housman, watched the young men go to their deaths:

> My dreams are of a field afar
> And blood and smoke and shot.
> There in their graves my comrades are,
> In my grave I am not.
>
> I too was taught the trade of man
> And spelt the lesson plain;

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But they, when I forgot and ran,
Remembered and remain.

One of the awful features of an all-embracing tragedy (America is finding this now, over Vietnam) is that it affects just as vitally those who are not actually "in" it, and those who vainly protest against it, as it does those who *are* in it. Just as vitally, and in some ways more painfully; for guilt and twisted envy fight against the overlying feelings of superiority and dissociation. It can happen to a whole community as well as to individuals; it has happened, some say, to Sweden. Strachey's response to it was the response of a writer; he composed, and published while the war was still on, *Eminent Victorians.*

There is no doubt that this, Strachey's first great success, is also his best book. It has a certain integrity of tone; it debunks and deflates throughout, whereas in its successors, *Queen Victoria* and *Elizabeth and Essex,* the sentimental vulgarity which was always a part of his mind comes uppermost. Appearing when it did, in the spring of 1918, it caught the general mood of weary resignation to a war which seemed endless and bitter anger against the leaders of the past who appeared to have "made" it. That was how some of the book's admirers saw it: "Lytton's essays," wrote David Garnett, "were designed to undermine the foundations on which the age that brought war about had been built." This seems an excessive claim; but it is true that the book had an astringency and force which performed a useful function for its time—and also, as I can testify, for those growing up in the 20's. It did the same sort of job as was done by Samuel Butler's *Way of All Flesh* or by some of Shaw's prefaces and Wells's novels. But after the first exhilaration and amusement, one began to wonder what there was of positive under this stream of clever negations; and it soon became clear that of real positives there was nothing —nothing but a few easy clichés about "tolerance" and "civilization" and Voltairian *"écrasez l'infâme!"* And then, when one had realised that, the shining surface began to fade here and crack there and to show some very cheap material underneath. This is something else which Mr. Holroyd does not seem to perceive. He devotes several unnecessary pages to re-hashing an ancient controversy over Strachey's suggestions that General Gordon was a drunkard. He decides that there is good evidence for it, and therefore, to his own mind, exonerates Strachey. What he does not seem to notice is that Strachey's real offence lies not in the allegation but in the style of tittering innuendo with which the allegation is made. A mature and honest historian, having come to the conclusion that Gordon was a drunk, would have said so plainly; Strachey says it in this style: "For months together, we are told, he would drink nothing but pure water; and then . . . water that was not so pure." "Now when he was in the mood—after a little b. and s., especially—no one was more capable

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than Gordon . . . of furnishing good copy for a journalist." (A "b. and s.," by the way, is a brandy and soda.) You cannot undermine foundations" by petty nibblings of that sort. At best, you may chip the plaster off a pillar or two; at worst, you will set going, by your patent unfairness and malice, a reaction back in favour of what you are trying to demolish: and that, in fact, is what happened with Strachey.

There is no need to pursue Strachey's life any further. After the great success of *Eminent Victorians* and the even greater success of *Queen Victoria,* he lived on through the 20's in a style not at all different from his style before 1914, except that he was much more prosperous and that the ambisexual circus which surrounded him became more numerous, more frenzied, and more complex than before in its anatomical gyrations. At last, the ill-health from which he had suffered all his life caught up on him. His last eighteen months were an appalling ordeal of sickness and pain. All the most distinguished physicians of London were called in; they suggested colitis, enteric, typhoid, paratyphoid, everything: and they were all wrong. After he died, it was found that " his stomach was practically eaten up by cancer. A malignant growth had formed, completely blocking up the intestine and actually making a perforation (through which food must have been passing) into the colon. From the first, he had had not the slightest chance of recovery." dr cecil reddie, and his Empire, had taken their revenge.

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VERNON YOUNG

The Fine Art of Name-Dropping

ON THE 29TH OF JANUARY, 1944, a German bomber crashed in flames near Sissinghurst, the Kent residence of Harold Nicolson and his wife, Victoria Sackville-West, narrowly missing the tower of their Tudor "Castle." Two days later, with the Anzio beach-head disaster enforcing general discouragement with the continuing misfortunes of war, Nicolson finds scrawled in a station lavatory used by the air forces, *Winston Churchill is a bastard!*

> I pointed it out to the Wing Commander who was with me. "Yes" he said. "The tide has turned. We find it everywhere." "But how foul" I said. "How bloody foul!" "Well, you see, if I may say so, the men hate politicians." Winston a politician! Good God!

In mid-February, when the Germans are occupying the monastery at Monte Cassino, Nicolson contends that great works of art are irreplaceable, human lives not, and courageously declares in his weekly "Marginal Comment" (for *The Spectator)* that the death of his own son would be preferable to the destruction of Monte Cassino abbey—unaware that in fact his son, Nigel, the editor of these volumes,[1] was that very day advancing towards the Cassino front. Almost at the same hour he receives an anguished letter from his wife in Sissinghurst, lamenting the damage done by air raid to Knole (the ancestral home of the Sackvilles). Waves of defeatism are sweeping the continent; in England a miners' strike is in progress. Churchill orates. He reveals the heavy losses in men and aircraft since the outbreak of war, forecasts stronger reprisals by the enemy (referring to the V1 and V2 missiles which were launched over England in the following June and September), admits that the Anzio landing was not carried out according to plan. Problems concerning territories about to be liberated are claiming the attention of the House. The B.B.C., of which Harold Nicolson was for the time being an almost impossibly high-minded Governor, is in the thick of executive disputes.

Smack in the middle of these assailing episodes, H. N. reads a brief but wholly disparaging estimate of his own life and literary achieve-

[1] HAROLD NICOLSON: DIARIES AND LETTERS, 1930-1939 (Vol. I, $10.00); THE WAR YEARS, 1939-1945 (Vol. II, $8.50); THE LATER YEARS, 1945-1962 (Vol. III, $8.50). Atheneum. Models of tact, the biographical introductions and the editorial continuity supplied by Nigel Nicolson enormously enhance the intrinsic interest of his father's material. And I must add—since American editions of books originally printed in Europe are often inferior—that the Atheneum volumes are first-rate: inner-case bindings, quality paper, liberal margins.

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ment, written by Edmund Wilson, entitled "Through the Embassy Window." (You will find it in Wilson's collection, *Classics and Commercials.)* It was Wilson's belief that the book he had under review, *The Desire to Please* (a biography of Hamilton Rowan, an ancestor of H. N.), was a bore; that Mr. Nicolson, whose natural habitat was behind an Embassy window, lived too far from the madding crowd to be acceptable by Mr. Wilson; that he was quite unable to enliven the diplomatic scene he so often depicted; that his disapprovals, otherwise, were too tony and that to date he had written only one book of any value and that *Byron: The Last Years* was not the one. (While I'm seething to disagree with the latter judgment, that is not the point of my having introduced the subject!) Harold Nicolson, in between air raids, the higher journalism and pressing counsels of state, found time to be wounded by these aspersions and to brood over the possibility that Wilson had come near the mark. Vita (i.e., V.S-W, his wife) was at the verge of outrage. She wrote to H. N.:

> . . . where he goes wrong over criticising you for so obviously belonging to a definite class, by birth, education, experience and consequent outlook, is that he ought to have stated it as a fact and not as an adverse criticism. He is falling into a common error of criticism, which is to demand that a writer shall be something he is not.

I pronounce a deadlock. Edmund Wilson was demanding only that a writer should engross his reader and in his opinion it was precisely Mr. Nicolson's "education, experience and consequent outlook" which were responsible for his disability as a maker of books. The particular application of the criticism may well be contestable; the critical principle is sound (isn't it pretty nearly that of Taine?—*race, milieu, moment).* And in a sense Nicolson gave weight to Wilson's very argument: he was impressed by it—the more so because (by his own acknowledgement) is appeared over the signature of a celebrated name. If a critic unknown to him had published an equally harsh disclaimer in, let's say, *The New Statesman,* he might have paid it no undue attention. One must concede that this *is* a legation attitude. On the other side, we may feel that there was more than a flavor of Boston Tea Party in Edmund Wilson's remarks.

Curiously, Wilson seems not to have known that at this date Mr. Nicolson had not stood behind an Embassy window, officially, for fourteen years. He resigned from the Foreign Office in 1929 to engage in journalism, chiefly in order to purchase and reconstruct Sissinghurst without being under financial obligation to his wife's mother, from whom the Nicolsons were entitled to a legacy. In 1931 he entered politics; after suffering a personal Dunkirk (his quixotic association with Oswald Mosley), he retreated in good order, becoming a member

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of Parliament for National Labour in 1935. As one of the few staunch opponents of the Munich pact, he delivered on that occasion probably the greatest—certainly the shapeliest—speech of his career, the closing cadences of which are in the great tradition and are, at the same time, profoundly personal.

> I know that those of us who believe in the traditions of our policy, who believe that one great function of this country is to maintain moral standards in Europe, not to make friends with people whose conduct is demonstrably evil but to set up some sort of standard by which the smaller Powers can test what is good in international conduct and what is not—I know that those who hold such beliefs are accused of possessing the Foreign Office mind. I thank God that I possess the Foreign Office mind.

In short, at the moment of Wilson's review, Harold Nicolson was already "a national figure of the second degree," as Robert Bernays was shortly to dub him. From May, '40 to July, '41, he served as Junior Member of Winston Churchill's government and for five years thereafter presided (nervously) on the board of the B. B. C. During nearly all his middle and later years he contributed a weekly column to *The Spectator* or to *The Observer,* wrote a number of books, mainly biographical or didactic, maintained his diary (of which we've been given but a twentieth part!) and wrote copious letters (those included in the current publication are mainly to his wife, occasionally to his sons, "Niggs" and Ben). Since the *Diaries and Letters* convey, among other matters, an almost epic narrative of war- and peace-making in our time, considerably above "the second degree," it must be inferred that the ambassadorial psyche of their author, alleged as a liability in the books he had written up to 1944, was not an altogether hopeless vehicle of expression and that an Embassy window was not so remote a school of observation as had been supposed. Of course, anyone eager to ratify and extend Wilson's opinion (which, for all I know, he no longer personally supports) will easily find confirmation if he concentrates on those pages, and there are many, where Nicolson serenely baits the common suppositions of democracy. Which would be a pity—for the total dazzling effect of these social and political impressions transcends in multitude, wit, compassion and principled core the brilliant malice which not infrequently makes an appearance. (Native American readers should grow another skin; Russians need not apply.)

The ebb and flow of a social world: its exchanges, acrimonious or civil; its amenities, follies and collisions; what some people said; what others did; *what it was like* to be in London—and numerous other places—during the decisive decades; who died; who published; who came to tea; and how the roof over it all fell in: this is the subject of Harold Nicolson's looseleaf trilogy. He had not to invest the

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subject—it was a gift from the gods, and from his connections—he had only to rise to it. I believe most readers will find that he did. Yet it is comically astonishing to learn that James Pope-Hennessy who, on at least two occasions, read the Diary, found it pompous and dull. Once he exclaimed indignantly, "But it's all about politics!". . . . It's all about politics—yes; if the headlong momentum of history is politics, that is what it is all about: the record of a career lived at pitch (negotiations, directives, consultations, campaigns, airplane hops to give lectures in Algiers or Athens), with interludes of quiet and disquiet with his family and his flowers, inscribed by a fastidious, honorable man who had a box seat during the crucial years as the West stood petrified, listening to the fulminations of Hitler, watching the great grey ships gather, hearing far away the death rattles of Spain, Czechoslovakia and Poland, decisively winning the war whose approach it had sanctioned, almost totally losing the peace and floundering, betrayed and betraying, into its last phase. We lived through it, each in his own way; those who came later have been supplied with no dearth of documentary sources. But Harold Nicolson's chronicle is unique: first, because it was filtered through a *temperament;* secondly, because it was observed and set down daily; little enough tranquility *he* had in which to recollect emotion. He wrote it as he met it, so to speak, instead of waiting for twenty years when memory falters or is liable to censure at the Bench of the ego. Read the memoirs of Anthony Eden or Duff Cooper; they are instructive but they are neither lively nor dramatic. Nicolson's work will be read simultaneously as a personal history, as a panorama of professional society (H. N. appears to have known nobody anonymous!) and as a contribution to the annals of diplomacy; these aspects are, in the telling, inseparable, one from the other. As if viewing a distinguished episodic film, rapidly cut and scenically various, we, the readers, are caught in the montage. Afterward, in the forefront of the mind, images prevail over ideas—images of a peopled world through which notables flit, often identified by name only, even by initials; then, suddenly (if I may change metaphor), like a conductor recalling a banished soloist and subduing the string section, Nicolson concentrates—relentlessly —on the performer of the moment.

> He [Axel Munthe] is very gaga and very blind. Everything seems to have oozed from him except that secretion of oil with which he flatters.
>
> We find that Adonis [Leslie Howard] at tea—he looks like an assistant master at some inferior school. Glasses and bad teeth. But he is a nice man. [He rings changes with that "nice man." Here, it is nearly the most damning touch.]
>
> She [Genevieve Tabouis, a journalist] hates De Gaulle so much that at the mention of his name some faint tinge of colour (no, it is

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just the poison circulating) comes into her ivory face.

He [a Swedish journalist] says that all Swedes know they will come in [i.e., into the war] in the end. I do not suggest to him that "the end" means the moment when it is quite clear which side is going to win.

At first sight he [Stanley Baldwin] is a solid English gentleman, but then one observes odd nervous tricks. He has an extraordinarily unpleasant habit of smelling at his notes and licking the edges slightly, as if they were the flap of an envelope. He scratches himself continuously. There are russet patches across his head and face. And a strange movement of the head, with half-closed eyes, like some tortoise half-awake, smelling the air—blinking, snuffy, neurotic.

My distaste for that General [Montgomery] passes all reasonable definition. [So, evidently, did his distaste for T. E. Lawrence, since he never adequately explains his abiding, ferocious repugnance towards the seven-pillared hero of Arabia.]

. . . Khrushchev howling in the Palais Chaillot [Summit Conference, 1960]. I heard the boos with pleasure. He sounded a little mad, I thought, and Miss Macmillan [H. N.'s housekeeper] says he was "like a schoolboy searching for rude words" which was true . . . and as an old diplomatist I became confirmed in my view that the exchange of insults is not the best method of conducting negotiations between sovereign states.[2]

His portrait of the prisoners in the dock at Nuremberg is pure Daumier.

> They look drab, depressing, ill. They have the appearance of people who have travelled in a third-class railway carriage for three successive nights. It seems incredible that such a dim set of men should or could have done such huge and dreadful things. . . . But when one looks more closely, one observes differences. . . .

And he looks more closely, until his penetration turns to compassion, as incredible as such a sentiment may seem. When it came to the kill, Harold Nicolson could not bear to see even the unrighteous man doomed.[3] Antipathetic though he could forcefully be, he had usually a fund of latent chivalry on which to draw. Over the years he tried hard to like Charles De Gaulle ("with the sad eyes of a retriever"); he never quite made it, but he helps us understand why De Gaulle, seriously frustrated as he then was by Roosevelt and Churchill, loves

[2] Thurber on the same subject: "Great oafs from little icons grow."

[3] It is amusing to compare with Nicolson's notes at Nuremberg those of Evelyn Waugh in a letter to Randolph Churchill (*Encounter*, July 1968). Waugh must have been the only writer in the world capable of describing the Nuremberg trials facetiously!

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none of us today. Churchill, himself, was Nicolson's favorite sitter; his earliest mention of him was in 1930—"A great round white face like a blister. Incredibly aged"; his last, at an Academy banquet in 1961 —"He is frightfully old. His eyes are bleary and immobile. I watched his huge bald head descending the staircase and I blessed it as it disappeared." Between these dates he introduces Churchill in a thousand shades and postures: stroking his stomach, bending his knees and scooping the air with widely-spread arms, as he addresses the house; Churchill bored at luncheon, Churchill affable in the smoking-room, Churchill pugnacious, Churchill beamish, Churchill fatigued, Churchill, as it were, sacred and profane.

The range of Nicolson's observations should not deceive us; while his acquaintanceships were illimitable, his affections were not numerous. If his aesthetic tastes were choice—French literature and English country houses—they were not catholic (he was, for instance, totally deaf to music) and his comprehension of others was likewise exclusive. To H. N., Man was not what he concealed or even what he achieved—but how he behaved. For Harold Nicolson had no philosophy, he had a code. (This is a limitation only if a philosophy is what you expect from him.) Since most people live without either, we may be grateful for the virtues of his insularity: they are at least entertaining, they are frequently humane, and the world has seldom been sweetened by those who hate their own kin and have no love of the earth they walk on. Nicolson's patriotism and pride of place was the source of whatever imagination he had about the world beyond his circle.

> June 12, 1940. I saw Andre Maurois this morning. He had left Paris yesterday. He said that never in his life had he experienced such agony as he did when he saw Paris basking under a lovely summer day and realised that he might never see it again. I do feel so deeply for the French. Paris to them is what our countryside is to us. If we were to feel that the lanes of Devonshire, the rocks of Cornwall and our own unflaunting England were all concentrated in one spot and likely to be wiped out, we should feel all the pain of all the world.

Prophetic words—and under stress of the Battle of Britain, he discovers in himself a store of courage that not only carries him through, physically, but restrains him from attempting to record "all the pain." His notations of the *blitz* are entirely admirable fusions of immediate peril and aesthetic distance.

> Dine with Sybil [Colefax] at the Dorchester. I get away as early as I can, but have to walk the whole way back to the Ministry. There is a hot blitz on. To the South, round about Westminster, there is a gale of fire, as red as an Egyptian dawn. To the north

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there is another fire which I subsequently see at closer quarters. The stump of the spire of Langham Place church is outlined against pink smoke. I walk on under the guns and flares and the droning of the planes. I fall over a brick and break my glasses. I limp into the Ministry to be told that we have sunk a large convoy between Sicily and Tripoli. This is the news we wanted.

After typing this I go to bed. I get off to sleep all right, but the blitz gets worse and worse, and the night shrieks and jabbers like an African jungle. I have never heard such a variety of sounds—the whistle of the descending bombs, the crash of anti-aircraft, the dull thud of walls collapsing, the sharp taps of incendiaries falling all around. The British Museum opposite my window turns rose-red in the light of a fire in the University. Every now and then it turns sharp white when a magnesium flare descends. Then rose-red again. It goes on all night and I sleep fitfully.

The war's end saw half Europe swallowed by the consents of Yalta, and in England, while the privileged life was not quite obliterated, as H. N. had feared it might be, he and contemporaries of his class lived pretty much like fish sequestered in pools left by the tide. Nicolson was as wrong about Stalin and Russia as he had been right about Hitler—but even Nostradamus nods. "We simply must practice appeasement," he had written to Nigel in 1945. "And there is this comfort in it. In appeasing Hitler we knew we were appeasing an advancing tide, and that he would consolidate every position gained. But I do not think the Russians are an advancing tide. I think that, as in 1814, they will gradually recede." Politically, Nicolson did not prosper after the war. Believing with his intelligence that social reforms were imperative, he became a Labour candidate in 1948, but his instincts rebelled and he was defeated. Whereupon he wrote, for *The Spectator,* a disdainful summing up of populism and of his constituents, an avowal that incidentally cost him a peerage. "Yes, I fear my Socialism is purely cerebral," he confessed simply in a letter to his wife. "I do not like the masses in the flesh."

Ortega y Gasset has wonderfully said that we spend our lives trying to discover in fact what we are by design. Harold Nicolson probably never knew that by design he was a master in the art of name-dropping. Throughout the pages of his diary, as a complement to his often acute deprecations of others, he strongly chastises himself. With a degree of pleasure, no doubt. "He who despises himself," wrote Nietzsche, "nonetheless esteems himself as a self-despiser." He thought it would be nice to ride in triumph through Persepolis, yet knew himself a failure as a political figure, for he had neither the generosity nor the gift of dissimulation that moves people in the aggregate. Since his life had been built on shared assumptions he could not bring himself to persuade; a gentleman never persuades, he only stands and

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waits. He was disappointed by the poor reception accorded most of his books, but in truth he had too many times written them out of obligation—to the family of Dwight Morrow, to his own family, to the Royal family. He tried to console himself with the thought that his life of King George V would endure. Even as he announces the belief, there flashes through our consciousness, fresh from the pages of his Diaries, *tableaux vivants* of a more incandescent and perishable order which only he could have made memorable and for which we would sacrifice any amount of official biography: butterflies above the zinneas of Sissinghurst "dissolving" into fighter-planes; a zebra in flight from the bombed zoo, escaping to Camden town; the grotesque end of Madame Desportes, killed by a suitcase when her master and puppet, Paul Reynaud, drives their car into a tree; Virginia Woolf, filling her boots with stones before drowning herself in a Sussex river; Ben Nicolson, a reluctant hero, stalking through London streets, erect in a plaster cast; Georges Simenon pacing the floor, pipe-in-mouth, explaining how earnestly he identifies himself with his principal—if the character is a drunkard, he begins to drink heavily (I gather that M. Simenon has so far managed not to murder anyone).

Towards the end of the final volume, all footsteps recede. There is only Sissinghurst and a dying wife. I don't remember who maintained that a man has lived when he has built a house, planted a tree, written a book. Harold Nicolson built a house, now a national treasure; he planted trees and a garden, as renowned as the house; "the book" I have been trying, in some sort, to describe. Also he raised two sons and loved his wife to idolatry. Nigel Nicolson tells us that his father continued to write the diary until October, 1964, but that in all respect he could scarcely print the extracts from the last two years; they disclosed an extremity of grief which had better be unrevealed. Our last view of H. N., therefore, is on June 2nd, 1962—a recapitulation, oddly, of the day when war was declared in 1939: the sun is radiantly shining and he is reading a book.

> I breakfast with Niggs and then I force myself to do my review of the composite book, *Companion to Homer*. I finish it at about 12.30, and start reading the newspaper. Ursula is with Vita. At about 1.5 she observes that Vita is breathing heavily, and then suddenly is silent. She dies without fear or self-reproach at 1.15. Ursula comes to tell me. I pick some of her favourite flowers and lay them on the bed.

All told, I think he must have been a very nice man.

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ROBERT GARIS

Too Much in the Sun

AFTER AND BECAUSE SCRUTINY FOLDED in 1953 Leavis wrote less often and his latest book,[1] which puts pre-1953 and post-1953 work side by side, confirms one's sense that he has been writing in general less well. But the title essay of the new collection explains the weakness of the post-*Scrutiny* sections of the 1956 *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* in such a way as to promote sympathy with it. And to those who like myself think of Leavis as one of the major critics in the language this is very good news.

In the past it always seemed possible to argue that Leavis' value judgments, which were phrased with a directness and force that anybody could recognize as Johnsonian, were also like Johnson's phrased "deliberately, not dogmatically." Johnson has always been something of a model for Leavis, and in the superb 1944 *Scrutiny* essay "Johnson as Critic" (reprinted in the new collection) Leavis shows once for all, I allow myself to hope, that Johnson's "mistakes' 'about Milton and Shakespeare aren't the kind that ought to encourage any nervous relativism about the flux of literary taste. These mistakes were founded on an alive and positive commitment to literary values that were deeply and fully realized and accurately placed in relation to other values. Leavis' brusque negative judgments, which exhibit his unique capacity to inflame disagreement and his unmistakable pleasure in doing so, used to represent an alive and positive commitment to values just as deeply and fully realised and as accurately placed as Johnson's. Had the leading academician who thought *The Great Tradition* ought to be called *Books I Like* been interested in reasonable discussion, I would have felt some confidence in being able to defend and even promote admiration for this sentence about Fielding, so characteristic of Leavis' tone: "He is important not because he leads to Mr. J. B. Priestley but because he leads to Jane Austen, to appreciate whose distinction is to feel that life isn't long enough to permit of one's giving much time to Fielding or any to Mr. Priestley." The provocative intention is highly audible but the meaning is reasonable. For Leavis proceeds to a summation of Fielding's work which shows that he has himself given Fielding enough "time" to do him justice, and at the same time explains why the subject of time is in question. The key sentence is this: "There can't be subtlety of organization without richer matter to organize, and subtler interests, than Fielding has to offer." This speaks equally to the teacher or student of literature and to the common reader, whose interests in matters of this sort coincide.

[1] ANNA KARENINA AND OTHER ESSAYS, by *F. R. Leavis*. Pantheon. $5.95.

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All the steps of Leavis' argument are debatable: whether it is "subtlety of organization" that incites the common reader to give time to a writer; whether Jane Austen's matter is richer and her interests subtler than Fielding's; whether, granted richer matter and subtler interests, Jane Austen is capable of subtlety of organization. But the *terms* of the argument are clear. And even those who disagree with him about Fielding will grant Leavis' general implication that the academy, through inertia or the pressure of vested interests, does "give time" to literature of the past (and, nowadays, the immediate present) that isn't worth the time, and that what the academy does in this respect will have a confusing and disabling effect, at a distance, on the common reader.

The difference between this reasonable and practical kind of value judgment and what takes place in Leavis' later work can be indicated first by the degree and the tone in which Leavis gives time to Lawrence and doesn't give time to other modern writers. I can't object to Leavis' bringing Lawrence's name in everywhere, since I too believe that the battle for Lawrence is still in process, despite and even because of the amount of time now spent on him by literary professionals; and I am respectfully convinced that as he has meditated on Lawrence's work through the years Leavis has come to feel its pre-eminence all the more strongly. So have I. But the time he has given to Lawrence after 1953 hasn't produced much new insight about this great artist, since it has been mostly misspent in turning up the volume-control of praise, and in finding more and more brutal ways of beating down other contenders. And with Eliot the brutality is not entirely candid, as in this passage from the Lawrence book:

> the plays in general to which Eliot has devoted himself since the completion of *Four Quartets* force us to recognize how little the genius of his personal poetry carried with it major creative powers —the creativity of a great creative writer. They exhibit something like a Flaubertian intensity of art: there is the slow, meticulous labour of calculating judgment that clearly went to the doing; and, on the other hand, there is the sick poverty, the triviality, and, finally, the nothingness of the done—the human and spiritual nullity.

The volume of sound in "major creative powers—the creativity of a great creative writer" deafens the mind to whatever sense these words convey and makes it harder rather than easier to understand the relation between this kind of art and Eliot's "genius for personal poetry." On the one hand a subtle distinction between high values is being suggested, since the word "genius" must have *some* force; on the other hand the vehemence of the attack diminishes the word "genius" to the point where it seems virtually a synonym for "knack"; and "personal poetry" seems similarly diminished.

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You can't argue with this kind of value judgment because the terms aren't clear, so that you can't see how rational disagreement could proceed. But then you don't *want* to argue with the judgment insofar as you do understand it, nor would most of the embarrassed reviewers of the plays who felt obliged, for not entirely unworthy motives, to treat the author of *Four Quartets* with an air of deference and respect while they were carefully showing that the plays deserved neither. Leavis' argument seems to be that when Eliot came to put his genius into operation in dramatic form, that genius was shown up as merely, or perhaps wrongly, a genius for personal poetry; but the first thing one notices about *The Cocktail Party* and the other plays is that they contain many passages in the same poetic *mode* as the *Quartets* but without any of the poetic vitality. So the plays revealed not the limitations of Eliot's genius but the fact that the genius was no longer operating at all. And since Leavis surely must have felt this too, one is hard put to understand why this simple fact is coming to us in the form of a new and confusing distinction between different kinds of genius.

Meanwhile Leavis' familiar old distinctions are being phrased with a new crudity. In the essay on *Anna Karenina* he rightly contrasts Tolstoy and James as essentially different kinds of artists, but here is the general statement of James's kind:

> A firm plan, expressing a definitive and masterful purpose, and excluding all that doesn't seem necessary to this, determines the perfection that James aims at. An addiction to "art" in this sense entails a severe limitation in regard to significance. . . . James's significances are those which, in relation to each given enterprise, he can bring, he feels, into the critical consciousness for thorough analysis, discuss with himself exhaustively, and provide for in relation to firmly grasped criteria.

But Leavis reprints in the new collection his 1947 *Scrutiny* essay on *The Europeans,* in which he speaks of James's as "a profoundly serious mind" and goes on to remark, in a general statement that the essay fully supports, that "the informing spirit of the drama is positive and constructive: James is unmistakably feeling towards an ideal possibility that is neither Europe nor America." Most of these words and in particular "unmistakably feeling towards" are rescinded in the new account of James's art, which presents him as the completely Flaubertian artist, never capable of "feeling towards" an ideal image but continually calculating, controlling, dominating in order to reach a sterile perfection of doing. By reprinting the essay on *The Europeans* Leavis invites us to wonder why he has so scornfully abandoned his old interest and his remarkable skill in making exact distinctions between the better and the worse James. To this question, which Leavis' writing has posed repeatedly in the last decade, there seemed no

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answer except the sad realization that a very strong mind had become a very rigid one. But the account of Tolstoy's art shows us that a more positive and constructive force has come into play, though some of its effects remain destructive.

"The relation of art to life in Tolstoy is such as to preclude [James's] narrowly provident economy. It is an immensely fuller and profounder involvement *in* life on the part of the artist, whose concern for significance in his art is the intense and focussed expression of the questing after significance that characterizes him in his daily living." The rest of the essay on *Anna Karenina* amplifies and refines this superb statement. The fact that part of the supremacy of *Anna Karenina* is due to its being an "intense and focussed expression"—to its being a great work of "art"—is argued with all the power and flexibility one would expect from a great critic; I admired in particular the sure choices of exemplifying detail from the huge work. But the essay is new and remarkable for the frankness with which Leavis presents his key word "questing." This frankness licenses me to sum up Leavis' new preoccupation very rapidly: the art that has come to seem to him the all-in-all is the art that most intensely and most frankly enacts the quest for significance, that most directly asks, "What for?" One understands the recent lack of interest in fine distinctions. In setting this highest form of art immediately in front of himself, Leavis has been blinded by the sun. The intense directness of Tolstoy's, Shakespeare's, Lawrence's enactment of the quest for significance has blinded him to the point where the kind of "feeling towards" significance represented in *The Europeans* (and so finely honored in Leavis' essay on that wonderful work) has come to seem hardly "questing" at all. Rarely has the best—and I do believe it is the best—been a more implacable enemy of the good, but at least one understands the process. And one now understands too the abuse of Eliot's plays which, one remembers, are full of characters explicitly "questing" after significance; to Leavis, Eliot's adaptation of the "form" of the highest art without the intensity of feeling that ought to fill out that form amounts to virtual blasphemy that deserves any amount, and any kind, of abuse. All of which is not to call blindness anything but blindness, but rather to indicate the occasions on which one can in the future hope to gain insight from Leavis' criticism. In the past one had to make a similar indication: "mature" self-criticism, for instance, has always been so central to Leavis' values as to make him a very misleading critic of *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Though his sense of Shakespeare's power is as eager, and has been as illuminating, as anything one can find in Shakespeare criticism, even this intense love and understanding could not encourage him to venture sympathetically into these plays, in which Shakespeare pays tribute to the beauty and magnetism exercised by certain natures whose virtual life-principle is an *incapacity* for self-criticism. In the past we could accept the fact

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that these plays were simply out of bounds, and therefore out of the range of Leavis' insight. The *Anna Karenina* essay shows us why the bounds and the range will in the future be even narrower.

All might yet be well, had not this narrowing created a new kind of problem for Leavis which he hasn't, it seems to me, faced squarely. In concentrating exclusively on the kind of art that asks "What for?" Leavis has complicated his dealings with the difficult word "answers." This is a sad falling-off. It would be to Leavis' essay on *Measure for Measure* that I would send somebody puzzled by the fact that literature dramatizes moral issues, enacts and expresses "values" and thus is a moral enterprise, yet doesn't yield paraphrasable "morals." Now his handling of the issue is far less sure, even when he addresses himself directly to it:

> What Tolstoy has to guard against is the intensity of his need for an "answer." For the concern for significance that is the principle of life in *Anna Karenina* is a deep spontaneous *lived* question, or quest. The temptation in wait for Tolstoy is to relax the tension, which, in being that of his integrity, is the vital tension of his art, by reducing the "question" into one that *can* be answered—or, rather, one to which a seemingly satisfying answer strongly solicits him; that is, to simplify the challenge life actually is for him and deny the complexity of his total knowledge and need.

A fine statement in most respects, yet there are disturbingly inconsistent implications: how can a *vital* tension, a *spontaneous lived* question, *guard* itself against a *temptation* to relax without becoming rather too rigid a tension, the product of the will rather than of the imagination? And when Leavis comes to the fact that Levin's "answer" is so decidedly "the close of the whole organization," he argues with an expert awareness of the issues, as you would expect, but also with a rather mechanical tentativeness: "we may tell ourselves that he is merely a character in the book, and that the book makes its implicit comment on Levin." We understand the sources of the difficulty when we read that "the suggestion of the whole doesn't in the least encourage us to think of Levin as anything but ill-judging, ill-inspired, and in for disillusionment." Disillusionment, perhaps, but the other two words are far too angrily negative to be an accurate account of the novel's implicit "comment" on Levin's answer. We realize that Leavis believes Levin's answer to be not merely a simplification of the challenge of life and a denial of its complexity but a wrong and bad answer. It goes dead against some of its own answers—which, in his intense need for them, he too like everybody else has developed—and the result is that because of something close to anger he is unable even to begin to extend imaginative sympathy to the religious interests which Levin's simplifying answer is responding to. Not that sympathy with Levin's religious interests would lead one to find his answer satisfactory; rather

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this sympathy would give one the confidence to say that the end of *Anna Karenina* simply doesn't work, and also the confidence to say that this doesn't matter very much. Leavis quotes Lawrence approvingly: "There you have the greatness of the novel itself. It won't let you tell didactic lies and put them over." Leavis, it seems to me, has never heard the most valuable part of this statement, the *tone* that implies: "Go ahead and tell didactic lies—everybody has to—the novel will save you from doing any damage by them." Leavis' rigid refusal to enter into Levin's religious interests makes him turn a harmlessly flawed masterpiece into a very strange—and unrecognizable—kind of success.

Leavis' answers make for other sorts of oddities in the recent work. In an essay on Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* he sets out to correct Tom Hopkinson's view that Conrad recommends "stolid application to duty" and to other "accepted codes and standards" as "man's only protection against bloody ruin and abandonment." And Leavis does very convincingly show that *The Shadow-Line* is the "quest" by means of which an imaginative and sensitive spirit internalizes the ideals and values that give vitality to the "accepted codes and standards" of his vocation. But in tracing this quest Leavis is elaborately reticent about *naming* the ideals and values that the young Captain discovers, and obsessively verbose in over-protesting the degree to which his own sensitive and reticent analysis may be doing damage to the dramatic complexity of the work of art. I interpret this strategy as a sign of nervousness about the fact that the ideals and values dramatically enacted in Conrad's tale are among those which Leavis himself holds; the Leavis of *Scrutiny* would have shown no such nervousness. The opposite kind of trouble about answers turns up in the over-valuation of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Here the values are indeed named, for Leavis' whole strategy with this book is to praise it because it enunciates values in which he strongly believes. They are so exactly the values that he finds in Lawrence—the real and alive "culture" that one can find in provincial manners, the "free and generous vitality [of Roxy], in which the warmly and physically human manifests itself also as intelligence and physical strength"—as to make Leavis' defense of Twain a part of his campaign for Lawrence: indeed one would be entirely mystified by the volume of praise if one weren't aware of the great figure in the background. For along with direct naming of these values, which are indeed present in Twain's work (though without the force Leavis claims for them) and which are beyond question important, there goes a loud assertion of Twain's "subtlety of organization" which simply isn't demonstrated. *Pudd'head Wilson* is worth some "time" for its few splendid pages, but I don't find in Leavis' essay any convincing refutation of my sense that most of the work is perfunctory and thin. "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* should be recognized as a classic of the use of popular modes—of the sensational and the melodramatic—for the purpose of serious art": I wish Leavis had worked a little harder to help me to recognize this. The sun can make you lazy too.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Must We Burn Mme. de Beauvoir?[1]

Baby, Come on Inside is the most recent of David Wagoner's five novels, the first of which was published fifteen years ago. He has doggedly managed to write himself into being more nearly a novelist than he was at the start. His novels have literary pretensions, they are probably supposed to derive from Hemingway, and the last two are readable; but maybe his ambition from the start has been strictly business, to sell a book to the movies. At any rate he keeps slipping into the all too easily visualizable reticences of the hard-boiled thriller, that compliant resource of American Grade-B and French New Wave film-makers alike. Where men are men and not mere intellectuals, words are few and looks are long, as in the climactic reconciliation scene between the two brothers in Wagoner's third novel, *Rock*:

> Not saying anything, Max held out his hand and left it there, and after a long pause, Timmy came forward, shook it once limply, and dropped it.
>
> Max said, "Thanks and nothing."
>
> Timmy glanced at him. "What?"
>
> "I just wanted you to hear it: nothing at all. How's that for a start? Nothing."
>
> They looked at each other, eyes held slightly off-center, and when there was no answer, Max turned and took the silence downstairs with him, feeling better, feeling ready for what might possibly be a picnic after all, beginning with nothing.

The trouble with novels is that they are made of words, and it takes words to say that no words were said; and so, recoiling from their own medium, hard-boiled novels are willy-nilly scenarios for movies starring the stoic shade of Humphrey Bogart. Nowadays the trashier the book the more likely it is to be translated by Truffaut or Godard

1 BABY, COME ON INSIDE, by *David Wagoner*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95. THE HORSES OF INSTRUCTION, by *Hazard Adams*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $5.95. A MARRIED MAN, by *Benjamin DeMott*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95. THE PENNY WARS, by *Elliott Baker*. Putnam. $5.95. MOSBY'S MEMOIRS & OTHER STORIES, by *Saul Bellow*. Viking. $5.00. THE SÉANCE AND OTHER STORIES, by *Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.95. DARK AS THE GRAVE WHEREIN MY FRIEND IS LAID, by *Malcolm Lowry*. New American Library. $5.95. FONG AND THE INDIANS, by *Paul Theroux*. Houghton Mifflin. $4.95. COME TO MY HOUSE, by *John McIntosh*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.95. STEPS, by *Jerzy Kosinski*. Random House. $4.95. THREE COMPLETE NOVELS (JUSTINE, PHILOSOPHY IN THE BEDROOM, EUGÉNIE DE FRANVAL) AND OTHER WRITINGS, by *the Marquis de Sade*. Grove Press. $1.75. (paperback). THE 120 DAYS OF SODOM AND OTHER WRITINGS, by *the Marquis de Sade*. Grove Press. $1.75. (paperback). JULIETTE, by *the Marquis de Sade*. Grove Press. $17.50.

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into a high-camp existentialist French insult to the intelligence like *The Bride Wore Black.* Meanwhile, naked sensibility beneath the trenchcoat, the lonely American will even endure people and an occasional salty joke as he waits for the novel's option to be picked up by Hollywood or Paris:

> ". . . I'm one of those suckers who doesn't know how to do very much and furthermore has to make a living at it. Next time the old bitch-goddess starts smiling at you, let me know what she looks like, will you? I've been on the hind tit of success for so many years, I've got a sort of rear-view implanted in my mind."
>
> Sibyl took a sip of her drink. "Well, quit kissing it and maybe she'll turn around."

This riposte comes from Wagoner's fourth novel, *The Escape Artist,* which is nevertheless a marked improvement on his first three. His first novel, *The Man in the Middle,* is journalistic sawdust about a man on the run. For *Money Money Money* he concocted a situation almost grotesque enough to enliven his treatment of it: what happens when a 36-year-old mental defective with a bad heart fights for the love of a girl who happens to be the mistress of a homicidal gang leader. *Rock* was his torpid attempt to explain the unruly young (in 1958!). He persists, however. *The Escape Artist,* which was published in 1965, has at last a bit of panache, with wisecracks that don't always misfire and much professional-sounding lore about lock-picking. And now *Baby, Come on Inside* offers more wisecracks, plus a bigtime showbiz protagonist who decides to celebrate his fiftieth birthday in his old home town:

> He said, "It's weird, isn't it. We're all grown up. We made it."
>
> His old man said, "Made what?"
>
> "I never thought we'd get this old."
>
> His mother said, "Mrs. Albert's boy entered medical school last week, and he's going to get straight A's."
>
> He came back to the edge of the kitchen. "Can I have a drink of water?"
>
> "How about some milk?"
>
> "Anything." He watched her wrench open the refrigerator like a stuck drawer. "If he just started, how does she know what his grades are?"
>
> She said, "He tells his mother everything."

Wagoner seldom does so well, but even here the manner is as thin as the pathos it aims at, it is arch and careful rather than simple and alert. (W. C. Williams' fiction would have been a better model than Hammett's or Hemingway's, but no novelists seem to read Williams.)

At least Wagoner, though he's a professor of English, doesn't look

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for America in the American university. Since the days when those clever types Mary McCarthy and Randall Jarrell disclosed that there are *fools* on campus, hundreds of the natives have ached to prove that universities make *sense*. Hazard Adams, in *The Horses of Instruction*, is the latest to put his hoof down with a didactic splash. The novel begins at an MLA convention, "not a meeting of minds but of slave traders." About a pretty girl, the narrator muses: "I wondered how much having that pretty face and body made her live on the surface of everything." Somebody is described as "pushing six feet" (a basket-case centipede?). Poetry: "he was feeling all of his convictions melt, his whole year's existence flash by him like trembling circus clowns"; "Till then she had wandered in a desert of discontent, but now she was ready to enter the lion's palace." Magic: "Hastings' efforts on her behalf had borne fruit." Truth and poetry: "We were all fools, the Yoricks of our own mirroring minds." Brass tacks: "Let's face it. I really disliked Cassoway, and I guess from the way things went the feeling was mutual." Speak for yourself, Doc: "she let out her laughter and punctured gaily those pomposities that, as a teacher, he had inevitably picked up along the way." Travel tips: "I caressed her smooth body, her breasts and nipples, and she said, 'Take me now.'" Psychology, or how to tell one horse's ass from another:

> But I doubt that Brendan was the tattletale villain Will made him out to be; Will was looking for an all-purpose scapegoat. Brendan may have overheard Jack advising Hungerford, but he wouldn't have told. Indeed, Brendan's sense of tribal loyalty prevented him from doing anything so rash, and he was never sure of Hastings.
>
> No, I'm pretty sure it was Ellen Fraser who spoke too much to Hastings, and I think Jack knew it. . . .

Benjamin DeMott is also an English professor, and *A Married Man* is also, really, about the campus. This time it's love, the sort of affair to which all older, married English professors are prone with gorgeous, passionate, devoted, subservient, sexy, intelligent, willing, understanding, slavish, very well read coeds:

> I kissed her. Her tongue was small and wild. She leaned back with her eyes closed, lips apart. Deliberately, patiently, I undid her clothes. She watched my hands gravely and kissed them when they were near her face. Her nipples, straight and alive, sent a delicate fear through me at the touch, as though it might be dangerous for my hands to touch her.
>
> "I know what," she said. Her lips were light and cool, tulipy against my mouth as she spoke. I felt the fiery smell of tobacco smoke down through the center of her like a root of fury. "You put nasty drugs in the scotch."
>
> "Everything," I said. I kissed her neck, her shoulders, her throat, her hair. I was still helping her with her clothes.

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"Doctor, we love what you're doing but—"

I had not stopped murmuring to her, and she said, "Oh *God*—" and I kissed her again, fearful of her excitement and elevated by it, as though everything she was and felt and said were my invention. It seemed to me I had barely touched her when, with a childlike sound, pitiably unprotected, she shuddered sweetly through herself into me and we met.

The author makes a perfunctory effort to disguise them as employees of a fancy modern business firm, but the tone is professorial, very dry and self-deprecatory ("I felt myself being shrewdly patient"), directed by Mike Nichols, the hard rind of modern urban stoicism (the lonely American again; the hero's name is Dr. Flint!) but on the inside as full of suppressed juices as a watermelon. Of course they do everything together:

I lie back with my head on the pillow. I reach out and touch her hair as it falls forward on my stomach.

"Jesus Lord." My voice vanishes inside me as she takes me very deeply between her lips. "Oh my God Jesus Lord my *Je*sus Jean—"

Zowie. It's all very candlelight-and-wine, and one of the most moving blow-jobs in world literature.

A few years ago Elliott Baker's first novel, *A Fine Madness,* got rave notices: "a masterpiece of rebellious farce" (*New York Times Book Review*); "hilarious, entertaining, wise, crazy, beautifully written" (*Los Angeles Times*); "one of the best comic novels to be written by an American" (*Harper's*). Listen to the cadences of the "wise, crazy" poet-hero ruminating on his new poem: "Thrust and proportion; it had both. There were still a few inarticulate passages where he'd reached higher and farther than ever before. These would need some carpentry before they took their places in the overall scheme of devastation and beauty." The rest of the novel is equally silly and badly written; and the attempts at comedy are on the level of the poet's giving his name as Chaucer or "Hank Longfellow" or "Johnny Milton" to various non-poets in the dull world he scorns. There is also an occasional rank provincial dose of know-nothingism:

Just as the nation's rivers found their way to the sea, so its human sludge wended to the twin cesspools of New York and Hollywood to hide in furnished rooms and Anglo-Saxon names. There, everything was seen wrong, all the silt from the belly of the land was collected and dehydrated into teaspoons of instant feces to be disseminated across the country as fashion and entertainment and education.

Even a *New York Times* reviewer, though he can't smell the nastiness of the prose, should be sensitive to the nastiness of the sentiments. But the author doesn't stop there. If Samson Shillitoe can bear up against imbecile psychiatrists, mad surgeons, lobotomy, galloping enuresis,

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women, and police brutality, the reason is that having been born in Cob City (big joke, no doubt), Indiana he has been blessed with virtues inaccessible to anyone spawned in either of the twin cesspools: "Character was formed in the first three years. If it hardened in a ghetto there was always the terror. If it hardened here there was always assurance." Similar pandering to small-town lunacies may be found in any fascist tract.

So it's pleasant to report that Baker's second novel, *The Penny Wars,* turns out to be an unpretentious and sometimes affecting book. The important figure is the humorless and exacerbated old German refugee, "incapable of compromise, abrupt with nonsense, intolerant of frivolity, unmindful of the approval of others," a man whose exile and Jewishness don't prevent him from asserting his intemperate nationalistic pride to the point of self-immolation: " 'What about Leibnitz?' he shouted. 'What about Goethe?' " Baker has too many things going—the old man's disaster, an adolescent's growing pains, portents of war (the novel takes place in the months just before World War II), portents of the Black revolution. Not enough is dramatized, and the different tones and materials of the novel don't blend or intersect convincingly. But it's a good try, almost a miracle after *A Fine Madness.*

The two most celebrated contemporary writers of the quarter are Saul Bellow and Isaac Bashevis Singer; but their new books—collections of short stories—are disappointing. Bellow's astonishing eclecticism looks very odd in a collection: the stories are related to one another only in the sleight-of-hand virtuosity with which each one manipulates the special style that Bellow chooses for it. Every style of Bellow's suffers from a chronic chill of pedantry and remoteness except the Herzog style, which is probably as close as we'll ever get to hearing Bellow himself. The best, if a rather slight, story is the only one in the Herzog style, "A Father-to-Be":

> At Christmas, Rogin almost went mad. Joan bought him a velvet smoking jacket with frog fasteners, a beautiful pipe, and a pouch. She bought Phyllis a garnet brooch, an Italian silk umbrella, and a gold cigarette holder. For other friends, she bought Dutch pewter and Swedish glassware. Before she was through, she had spent five hundred dollars of Rogin's money. He loved her too much to show his suffering. He believed she had a far better nature than his. She didn't worry about money. She had a marvelous character, always cheerful, and she really didn't need a psychiatrist at all. She went to one because Phyllis did and it made her curious. She tried too much to keep up with her cousin, whose father had made millions in the rug business.

"The Old System" is Augie March in a funereal mood; "Looking for Mr. Green" is Depression naturalism, more supple than its model; "The Gonzaga Manuscripts" is the product of Bellow's unaccountable

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impulse to redo "The Aspern Papers"; "Leaving the Yellow House" may have compassionate intentions but it's an iceberg of a story, a demoralizing account of the nullity of a down-and-out old woman; "Mosby's Memoirs" is in Bellow's latest brilliant, showy, dense, protective manner behind which the reader is not admitted.

Singer's collection has the expectable large quota of *shtetl* yarns and amusing Yiddish types; but, skilful and generous as he is at coming back to it over and over again, the material is beginning to wear, the benignly conspiratorial voice is becoming coy (Singer has always recognized the risk; the narrator in an earlier collection remarks bitterly that his stories are "pablum and duck milk"):

> Yes, mimicking is forbidden. If you imitate a person, his fate is passed on to you. Even with a shadow one is not allowed to play tricks. In Zamosc there was a young man who used to play with his shadow. He would put his hands together so that the shadow on the wall would look like a buck with horns, eating and butting. One night the shadow jumped from the wall and gored the young man as if with real horns. He got such a butt that he had two holes in his forehead afterwards.

In his introductory Note, Singer writes: "I am glad that three of the stories—the title story, 'The Lecture,' and 'The Letter Writer'—deal with events in the United States or Canada." They are also the best stories in the book and as grim as mortality, which is their subject. So in "The Séance" Dr. Kalisher, destitute old philosopher trapped by the foolish tricks of the woman who has befriended him, faces the humiliation of incontinence:

> He sat there stiff, wet, childishly guilty and helpless, and yet with that inner quiet that comes from illness. For years he had been afraid of doctors, hospitals, and especially nurses, who deny their feminine shyness and treat grownup men like babies. Now he was prepared for the last degradations of the body. "Well, I'm finished, *kaput*." . . . He made a swift summation of his existence. "Philosophy? what philosophy? Eroticism? whose eroticism?" He had played with phrases for years, had come to no conclusions. What had happened to him, in him, all that had taken place in Poland, in Russia, on the planets, on the far-away galaxies, could not be reduced either to Schopenhauer's blind will or to his, Kalisher's, eroticism. It was explained neither by Spinoza's substance, Leibnitz's monads, Hegel's dialectic, or Heckel's monism. "They all just juggle words, like Mrs. Kopitzky. . . ."

"The Lecture" is about death in a strange place; "The Letter Writer" is about life at a minimum, near absolute zero. Singer writes as the survivor: it's what he has been for many years and will be for the rest of his life; and the tone is one which, when he can bear to assume its meaning directly, doesn't fail him.

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Singer has something to say, and a practiced mind. Malcolm Lowry, if he can be judged by his books, had only the aim of being a great writer. Douglas Day, who together with Lowry's widow edited *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid,* writes that Lowry "was really, for all his romanticism, for all the exoticism of his prose, the most cerebral of writers, a real intellectual's delight"; and he calls *Under the Volcano* "magnificent . . . a great novel." Well maybe it is, but can we have a look? Geoffrey, an alcoholic, who under the twin shadows of Popo and Ixta broods a lot and feels guilty, thinks: "Look up at that niche in the wall over there on the house where Christ is still, suffering, who would help you if you asked him: you cannot ask him." Yvonne, his former wife, crosses "her unusually beautiful and aristocratic long legs." Yvonne says: "Geoffrey, this house has become somehow evil." Geoffrey thinks: "It was a day like a good Joe Venuti record." Hugh says: ". . . get to know the real people: the seine fishermen, the old boatbuilders, the trappers . . ." Yvonne writes to Geoffrey: "Darling, why did I leave? Why did you let me? . . ." M. Laruelle says to Geoffrey: "Have you gone mad? . . . you treat her indifferently as this, and still continue only to care where the next drink's coming from?" Or: " 'Geoffrey!' M. Laruelle said suddenly, quietly, 'has she really come back?' " Geoffrey thinks: "She would cook and clean and Geoffrey would chop the wood and bring the water from the well. And they would work and work on this book of Geoffrey's, which would bring him world fame." Yvonne writes to Geoffrey: "What is there in life besides the person whom one adores and the life one can build with that person? . . . My heart has the taste of ashes, and my throat is tight and weary with weeping. . . . Oh, Geoffrey, how bitterly I regret it now. Why did we postpone it? Is it too late? I want your children, soon, at once, I want them, I want your life filling and stirring me. I want your happiness beneath my heart and your sorrows in my eyes and your peace in the fingers of my hand . . ."

Dark as goes on in the same way. Sigbjørn thinks about Primrose: ". . . it was that eagerness in her that was so touching and yet so vulnerable and that he did not wish to spoil or hurt." Primrose says to Sigbjørn: "Oh, Sigbjørn, I want to drink what you drank and do everything that you did." Sigbjørn has premonitions about journeys: "And yet he had the mysterious feeling that this road from Mexico City to Cuernavaca had something to teach him . . ." Sigbjørn thinks about his life: "Was he the director of this film of his life? Was God? Was the devil?" Sigbjørn, examining ancient sculpture and hieroglyphics, speculates about art: "Who were the authors of these writings, and why did they prefer to show cripples in their sculptured stones? Was it their intent to ridicule certain enemies? Or should we see in these sculptures a representation of the sick, who came to a temple in which there was a god who performed miraculous cures? Could Mount Albán be a kind of Lourdes? Was there not some identity with modern art—yes, and modern writing—in this? Was art at bottom a form of propi-

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tiation?—God, what depths beyond depths of meaning there was in all these things."

God yes, there sure was all those depths somewhere or other, possibly even in Mexico, but poor Lowry missed every one of them as well as a few points of grammar and any creditable form of mental activity.

Writing about contemporary Africa, Paul Theroux and John McIntosh are more modest and less symbolical. *Fong and the Indians* starts with the disadvantage of attempting the same tone and subject as the best of Evelyn Waugh's novels, *Black Mischief,* which before Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia had already done the classic comic treatment of a black African nation Westernizing itself; and Theroux shows the strain sometimes, especially in his leaden-footed fooling about the cartoon pair of Maoist Chinese and the Cohn-and-Schine idiot Americans competing for the allegiance of the apolitical Chinese grocer. But several touches aren't incompatible with Waugh in good form; for instance, the arrest of the cabinet ministers—

> The Prime Minister invited all his ministers to the State House to discuss the rumors. ("Let's be English about this," the Prime Minister was supposed to have said; to the press he said, "Mind your own business. This trouble it is just a family squabble because I am fed up of this disloyal and stupid cabinet.") When the ministers arrived and were seated and drinking in the mansion the army drove up, handcuffed six of them who were pointed out by the Prime Minister—a careful sign from him, perhaps a gentle nod—threw them into the back of a truck and took them to a detention camp.
>
> At the moment of his arrest, one of the ministers (he happened to be the Minister of Finance) suddenly produced two fistfuls of American dollars from beneath his traditional costume (long robes embroidered with lovely designs, and a peaked cap that made him look like a sorcerer). He waved these two crumpled bouquets at his colleagues while frantically repeating that he had lots more for anyone who would help him. He was seized by three soldiers. The remaining cabinet members pretended not to see him until the trucks were out of sight. Then they made a dash for the money that had been knocked out of the Minister of Finance's hand. This they divided equally.

As for *Come to My House,* the other novel about Africa, any synopsis of it can hardly avoid making it seem trivial, sentimental, anachronistic. It's about an eighteen-year-old boy growing up in a small town in South Africa: there are a gentle father and mother, a frisky grandmother, a beautiful girl next door and her plain sister, no blacks and no mention of *apartheid* except in a sermon by an eccentric parson whose gaffe is allowed to pass without comment by the company. Yet nothing is square and settled, and the author's quiet manner among the slightly strange events is itself unsettling. The father has

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an almost suicidal compulsion about winning the annual foot race, and indulges in not quite scandalous drinking bouts with the respectable housewife from next door. The grandmother does quaint things but her battiness is often a means of eluding unendurable fact:

> His grandmother was in a deck chair by the pride of India bush. She was eating ice cream. "I'd like to have a bucketful of this lovely stuff every day," she said when he approached her. "It's so soothing for the throat."
>
> He snatched the plate off her lap, and she sat with an empty spoon in mid-air. Her eyes looked everywhere except at him. "Don't be angry," she said pleadingly. "There's nothing you or I can do now except keep out of the way. In the midst of life we are in death."

The boy can be cruel and malicious, and unremorseful. The beautiful girl is entangled in a messy hopeless affair with a visiting stranger. The plain sister is a mental defective (if David Wagoner would like to have another go at presenting such a character, McIntosh could show him how), whom the author develops into the most interesting character in an interesting novel:

> "It's me," mouthed Helen. "Let me in."
>
> "Oh . . . you," he said with relief.
>
> He unlocked the French window, and the cool air of near dawn flowed into the room with her. "Leave them open," she said. "It's so stuffy in here. Would you like to come and look at the stars? I brought my telescope along and fixed it up on the lawn."
>
> He shook his head. "No thank you."
>
> "That doesn't matter in the slightest," said Helen. "Do you notice anything different about me?" She had on a long nightie that had been to the wash too often, and her feet were bare.
>
> "No," he said.
>
> "I've combed and brushed my hair," she said. "And I'm holding my shoulders up straight."
>
> . . . . .
>
> "Thank you for coming," he said. "Would you like some coffee?"
>
> "Oh yes!" Judging from the way she answered, he might have offered her something precious. "I really would love a cup of coffee; that would be marvelous."
>
> They drank their coffee. She said, "I brought my Monopoly set, too. It's also on the lawn. Shall we have a game?"
>
> "Yes, go and get it."
>
> They played Monopoly, sitting cross-legged on the floor. He let her win all the smart places—Park Lane and Mayfair and Piccadilly —and she was happy.

On the other hand, one of the recurrent events in Jerzy Kosinski's novels is the gang-rape; this one, for example, from *Steps*:

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> When I came to, I could see the men tearing off the girl's clothing. She fought, kicking and biting. I braced myself and almost managed to get up, but the men pushed my head back against the ground. I looked toward the girl: she had been forced down on her back, her legs flailing; they were upraised and spread apart, like oars suspended above the water before striking.

Kosinski's full range is exhibited in his first novel, *The Painted Bird,* which includes among many other instances such Grand Guignol as a man being eaten alive by rats and a cuckold gouging out the eyes of his wife's lover.

Kosinski is a witness to the horrors he lived through as a child in wartime rural Poland: he presents them as mirror-images to the coincident horrors of the Nazi ascendancy, and as proof of universal guilt. But, whatever his life has been, his books keep an eye on the audience, they read like slick and cynically selected anthologies; like the film *Mondo Cane;* like Andreyev (one of whose stories has a gang-rape episode suspiciously like the one quoted in part above), in response to whose shockers Tolstoy recalled "the story about a boy who, unable to pronounce the letter 'r,' said to his chum: 'I went for a walk and suddenly I saw a wolf. . . . Are you fwightened? Are you fwightened?' 'So Andreyev,' continued Tolstoy, 'also keeps on asking me: "Are you fwightened?" And I am not in the least frightened.' "[2] Appropriately, *The Painted Bird* ends in a crude blare of socialist realism, with hymns of praise to the liberating Red Army and to Gavrila and Mitka, tender and guileless Heroes of the Soviet Union. After such guilt, such redemption.

Kosinski is trying our souls, which recover quickly; but reading three thousand pages of the Marquis de Sade is like having a serious illness. So it's a relief to turn up a few laughs among Sade's critics. "I am in the habit of reading at breakfast," says Edmund Wilson, "but I found that *Les 120 Journées* was the only book that I could not face while eating." In *Must We Burn Sade?* Simone de Beauvoir is nervous about Sade because he wasn't altogether committed to the emancipation of women, to orthodox Freudianism, and to what in *The Painted Bird* Kosinski calls "the march of the working masses." Having pored over Sade's hundreds of denunciations of the female genitals, his thousands of lively descriptions of anuses and the act of sodomy, of lovers defecating or vomiting into each other's mouths, or skinny-dipping in pools of excrement and being licked bare again by their partners before proceeding to connection—having pondered all these testimonies, Mme. de Beauvoir arrives at a definitive conclusion: "It is impossible to tell to what extent women were anything but surrogates and toys for Sade. It may be said, however, that his sexual character was essentially anal. This is confirmed by Sade's attachment to money." D. J. Enright is less charitable because he is apo-

[2] Ernest J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy* (Vintage, Vol. II, 1946), p. 347.

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plectic with save-the-women-and-children British indignation: " 'Must we burn Sade?' asks Mme. de Beauvoir. Now that you mention it, why not? The world is littered with literature. And Sade teaches us little about human nature which we couldn't gather from a few minutes of honest introspection."

Leaving aside Enright's awesome powers of introspection, one wonders at his hospitality to that old firebrand censorship. Literature had better stretch to what Enright expects of it, or up the chimney it goes. His implicit proposition is that literature can do great bracing things if it isn't in the hands of an impudent bounder like Sade. Touchy intellectuals like to defend the high-mindedness of art against artists and the unworthy public, they deplore the refusal of mankind to be correspondingly high-minded: culture-vulture George Steiner goes still further, scoring the incapacity of art to guarantee the production of intellectuals as high-minded as himself, and he cites the example of death-camp commandants who would come home to an evening of Goethe and Schubert after a hard day at the ovens. Isn't it dreadful, says Steiner, that Goethe and Schubert don't convert mass-murderers into literary critics? Burn Sade, answers Enright, and maybe they will.

Enright, however, has read the brute, or "selections" anyhow, and crams him into literary history: "*Justine: Pamela* rewritten as pornography. *Juliette:* a female *Tom Jones* reconstructed in the same spirit. . . ." It is true that Sade admired Richardson and Fielding, to whom he paid enthusiastic tribute in his "Reflections on the Novel":

> 'Tis Richardson, 'tis Fielding, who have taught us that the profound study of man's heart—Nature's veritable labyrinth—alone can inspire the novelist, whose work must make us see man not only as he is, or as he purports to be—which is the duty of the historian—but as he is capable of being when subjected to the modifying influences of vice and the full impact of passion.

Vice and passion are the novelist's materials because they are the universal motives, the inseparable presiding fantasies, the sole sources of pleasure. Sade discloses and elucidates them as Richardson and Fielding, sinking into prudence and melodrama, don't quite dare: Sade slips the brakes of melodrama: the threatened beautiful virgin really does get raped, tortured, flagellated repeatedly, variously, at every orifice; over and over again, bound and squirming on the railroad tracks, she really does get chopped into messes by the irresistible locomotive. You can write your own lubricious and sadistic descriptions, which will be not more schematic, more quantitative, more repetitious than Sade's are most of the time; but Sade is the founder, he is all conviction, his prophetic energy is so disproportionate to his imagination as to produce not horrors but a game of forfeits and very high numbers, metaphysical farce, Rube Goldberg assembling the atomic bomb:

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". . . he's assured of release and safety," says the Minister, "if, profiting speedily from the admirable state my ass tells me his prick is in, he consents to bugger-fuck his daughter."

"Monsieur," I said to this gentleman, "ought you to hesitate? For is it not better a hundred times that you fuck your child than murder her?"

"Murder her!"

"Why yes, Monsieur; do you refuse and she's undone. Dead, I say, if you balk."

And the while one of the women holds this little girl's buttocks at full divide and moistens the hole within, I quickly snatch the engine out of Saint-Fond's bum and clap it to the threshold of Julie's; but Cloris, in revolt, drives not past the gate.

"So be it, so be it, since he won't fuck her," says Saint-Fond, "she'll have to die."

At this cruel pronouncement resistance melts away. I fit the girl's loins up near the member, I push it into the anus; for as much as the requisite preparations have all been made, my efforts culminate in triumph, and Cloris who would not become the child-murderer becomes incestuous to the tune of a liberal outgushing of fuck. Délie was fustigating Saint-Fond, in the meantime he was vexing the mother's ass and kissing the buttocks of one of the lackeys; but this lackey is soon fucking him, and now a close-on view of Délie's behind seems to inspire him. The inconstant Saint-Fond ordered this group dissolved too; still stubbornly holding his seed in check, he appears before us in a greater fury than any wild beast: he shrieks, he bellows, there's foam on his lips, curses in his mouth; as soon as Delcour spews into Julie's cunt, he has him embugger her mother. . . .

Sade's psychology, we are assured, is a dud: Wilson and (in *The Romantic Agony*) Mario Praz, not to resurrect Enright and Mme. de Beauvoir, snort with amusement almost before they bring it up. His attitude toward women, for example, is clear and objectionable enough; until some thinking about it makes for a puzzle. At every opportunity, he prompts all of his characters (including the women) to declare that women are detestable, particularly their "fronts"; that they are inferior to men as animals, as minds, as machines for pleasure; that sodomy is the élite sexual mode: yet women are everywhere in his fiction, talking and doing and enjoying as tumultuously as the men; Sade seems powerfully attracted by female beauty; even the innumerable sodomies are usually performed on women, sometimes *by* women (equipped with sapling-sized dildoes); his most admirable protagonists are women. Doubtless, if he had lived in our time he would have been a homosexual and written sophisticated Broadway hits; but why do women fascinate him so? One provisional answer is that Sade sees in them the locus of a dilemma. Sade insists that love and

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pleasure don't mix, that love merely inhibits the lover from enjoying himself while he endeavors to please his beloved: to which we retort that mutual understanding is indispensable to a high-class relationship; and Sade says, Ah yes, courtship, man's duty to rouse his catatonic mate. The most obvious fact about the women Sades admires—Juliette especially—is their spontaneous combustibility: the rapidity, total bodily involvement, and self-absorption with which they come to orgasm; they are self-serving, unaccommodating, and delighted; and if some women, why not all? Sade himself seems to have experienced orgasm, like his hero Saint-Fond, in much the same way, with shrieks, bellows, whinnies, convulsions, and other signs of general satisfaction. If some men, why not all? Maybe Sade means that love is woman's revenge on man's stupidity; that solicitous men are sexually absurd and women bide their time; that love is bogus therapy for sexual paraplegics. But Sade, without a reader, scribbling away in his prison or asylum cell at botched blueprints for unimaginable moral structures, shouts as Saint-Fond does resting between corpses, "Am I not the wickedest man in the world?" The exquisite French Satanists adore him, and the bluff Anglo-Saxons disapprove.

Sade isn't the monster of depravity he thinks he is, but he's a monster all the same. Baffled autistic dreamer, like one of those early saints balancing on a pillar in the desert, he spends his life furiously retracing the simple geography of his dreams, which within a generation and forever after will dwindle into belles-lettres among stylists like Byron, the Brontës, and Poe, down to Genet and Kosinski. Sade will begin to matter when he has been read, and discriminated from his epigones. His legitimate entrance into literature is going to damage a considerable number of reputations, which will turn out to have been based on feeble presentiments or feeble echoes of Sade's mildest effects.

Three thousand pages of Sade in print! Sade writes second-rate eighteenth-century romances with distinctively Sadean plots (*Eugénie de Franval, Ernestine, Florville and Courval*); a tenth-rate sentimental drama (*Oxtiern*); a Sadean exercise handbook (*Philosophy in the Bedroom*); an advanced handbook for mature athletes who like to eat shit (*The 120 Days of Sodom*); and two novel-length stories (one of them only slightly shorter than *War and Peace*), each of which recounts the adventures of a fearless and indestructible woman to whom everybody—including statesmen, monarchs, archbishops, and Sade's engaging and impressive Pope Pius VI—does explicitly everything.

Sade is a bad writer, monotonous, inefficient, interminable, nutty as a fruitcake, often as empty and boring as interstellar space; his excremental obsession is intolerable at the breakfast table; he doesn't write novels or pornography or anything else usefully classifiable; and he needs to be read.

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BERNARD BERGONZI

A Poet's Life

In his book, *The Novel Now,* Anthony Burgess defends the novelist's right to be prolific, pointing to the fertility and energy of the great Victorians as an ideal to be followed, and deploring the sparse output of some of the most admired masters of modern fiction. Certainly, Mr. Burgess, who began publishing novels only in the mid-fifties when he was already nearly forty, vigorously follows this precept, so that he now has more than a dozen novels behind him, plus two or three miscellaneous works of non-fiction. Recently this formidable rate of production has been slowing up a little, in ways that will seem wholly natural if one remembers that Mr. Burgess is a one-man enterprise and not a syndicate. So it is not surprising that not all of his new novel[1] is, in fact, new. The first part of *Enderby* came out in England in 1963, with the title of *Inside Mr. Enderby;* it appeared under the pseudonym of "Joseph Kell" and was duly reviewed by Anthony Burgess in his capacity as a newspaper fiction critic. However, "Joseph Kell" did not survive this piquant confrontation, and when the second part, *Enderby Outside,* appeared in 1968, its true paternity was acknowledged. The combined work is a comic *Künstlerroman* of some length, Burgess' Portrait of the Artist as a Middle-Aged Man, showing scenes from the life of a seedy poet called F. X. Enderby.

The allusion to Joyce, made this early in my review, is not only intentional but inevitable. More than any of his English contemporaries, Burgess infuses his prose with a literally fantastic energy and inventiveness, in which Joyce—and often late Joyce, at that—is his most obvious mentor (with Nabokov as a good second); Burgess is, after all, the author of *Re Joyce* and the editor of a shortened version of *Finnegans Wake.* Yet Burgess is not, in the usual sense, an avant-garde writer, although in a novel like *A Clockwork Orange* he can be a difficult one. The brilliance of his linguistic enterprise often goes with a quite conventional attitude to questions of fictional construction and characterization, which can produce an oddly disproportionate effect, where the manner seems too much for the matter. *Enderby,* which starts magnificently, dwindles by degrees into a rather ordinary fictional artefact, full of the depressing habits of a wide range of modern English fiction.

This novel shows, however, that Burgess' relation to Joyce is not merely stylistic; the shadow of an abandoned Catholicism falls heavily across the work of both of them. Like Joyce, Burgess was born and brought up as a Catholic; not, indeed, in Ireland, but in Lancashire, which is the most traditionally Catholic part of England, where many

[1] ENDERBY, by *Anthony Burgess.* W. W. Norton. $5.95.

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families, like Burgess', preserve an ancient allegiance to the Catholic Church. But English Catholicism is heavily impregnated with Irish influences, particularly in Manchester, where Burgess was educated. In the opening pages of his last novel, *Tremor of Intent,* there is a vivid and horrifying account of the hero's schooldays in a repressive and authoritarian Catholic environment, which must surely be autobiographical and which is reminiscent of parts of Joyce's *Portrait.* Burgess, although describing himself as a "renegade Catholic," retains more positive feelings about his ancestral religion than Joyce did. In his contribution to a recent collection of pop-theological essays, *The God I Want,* Burgess has remarked: "In a Dublin hotel a year or so ago, over the late night fire, having a twelfth Guinness with the night porter, I collapsed into maudlin tears and called on God, the Irish God of my childhood, Whom I'd since spurned and neglected." Yet this God was not a beneficent deity; Burgess says, elsewhere in the same essay, "The God my religious upbringing forced upon me was a God wholly dedicated to doing me harm." What, above all, Burgess seems to have inherited from his upbringing is the Jansenistic or Augustinian cast of mind which is typical of traditional Irish Catholicism, and which sees the world as almost irredeemably sinful and corrupt. It stands at an opposite pole to the genial, busy, humanistic Catholicism that is now so evident in the English-speaking world.

The poet Enderby is also a lapsed Catholic, and although not an Irishman he is absorbed in bodily corruption in a way that would make him a suitable honorary fellow-countryman of Joyce, Beckett or Flann O'Brien. Enderby lives alone in a seaside town in the south of England; he has a small private income and devotes his whole time to the composition of poetry. Masturbation is his one sexual activity—he has no wish for any other—and he finds that defecation is a sure means of triggering off poetic inspiration. As a result he spends a great deal of his time seated on the lavatory; the bath is full of drafts of poems and is hardly ever used for its proper purpose. Enderby has a few drinking companions in the local pub, and these provide all the company he needs; he buys his own food and cooks it appallingly badly, in a kitchen of unspeakable squalor. All this is, of course, very Joycean: Enderby looks like a fusion of Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. His sessions on the lavatory and his onanistic tendencies recall Bloom, while the idea of poetic creativity burgeoning in the midst of dirt and every kind of physical degradation is characteristic of Stephen. Enderby is the last inheritor of the powerful myth of *la nostalgie de la boue.*

His childhood was miserably dominated by his blowsy, illiterate, Catholic step-mother. She is responsible for his impotence, his fear of normal sexuality, all the attitudes which Lawrence would reprobate as "anti-life," although Burgess invites us to regard them quite calmly and even sympathetically. Enderby's whole life has been a long terrified retreat from her fleshly grossness. She also stands, on another level,

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for Catholicism, something from which Enderby has also retreated but which continues to fascinate him. He is at last lured out of his cosy, dirty flat by an invitation to London to receive a small literary prize. In the train he sits in the WC composing a poem to the Virgin Mary:

> Whence this Marianism? Enderby knew. He remembered his bedroom with its devotional pictures by Italian commercial artists: Pius XI with triple tiara and benedictory gesture; Jesus Christ with radioactive heart exposed and—for good measure—indicated by a divine delicate index-finger; saints (Anthony, John the Baptist, Bernadette); the Virgin Mary with tender smile and winsome wimple;
>
> I was nowhere, for I was anyone—
> The grace and music easy to receive:
> The patient engine of a stranger son.
>
> Outside the bedroom door had been a holy-water stoup, dried up with the drought of Enderby's boyish disbelief. All over the house, as far as the frontier of the shop's neutral or Protestant territory, there had been other stoups, also crucifixes, plaster statuettes, withered Holy-Land palm-leaves, rosaries blessed in Rome, an Agnus Dei or two, decorative pious ejaculations (done in Dublin in pseudo-Celtic script) as brief as snarls. That was his stepmother's Catholicism, imported from Liverpool—relics and emblems and hagiographs used as lightning-conductors; her religion a mere fear of thunder.

A passage like this shows the vigour and sharpness of Burgess' prose. It, and similar passages, also provide a convincing illustration of the *mores* of a popular Catholicism that, in its English version, has had virtually no fictional treatment (the Irish form, from which it stems, has, of course, been memorably rendered by Joyce): indeed, the only comparable account by an English novelist that I know of is David Lodge's *The Picturegoers,* which slightly sentimentalizes the whole thing.

Enderby, as Burgess presents him in the first hundred pages of the novel, is a splendid piece of characterization: he is both pathetic and very funny, disgusting and endearing, and although full of literary and cultural overtones, he stands four-square as a realised individual. It is, however, a somewhat static presentation, and the plot starts to move when Enderby goes to London to collect his prize: removed from his natural environment he embarks on a series of upsetting adventures. At the prize-giving, Enderby meets a beautiful woman journalist, the elegant but predatory widow of a racing motorist, who takes up Enderby and decides that he must be rescued from degradation. He is unable to resist her, and before long they are married. Like Dorothea Brooke and Isabel Archer before him, Enderby undergoes a disastrous honeymoon in Rome: his impotence asserts itself and his wife turns more and more bitchy. Eventually Enderby escapes and returns to England, where he attempts suicide: at the end of part I

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he is being rehabilitated in a psychiatric hospital, his name changed to Hogg.

The second part of *Enderby* lamentably degenerates into a series of comic picaresque adventures of the kind that English reviewers often approvingly describe as a "romp," or even a "glorious romp." Coming from a less talented novelist they would be acceptable, but they represent a sad decline from the opening. Enderby-Hogg, having supposedly been "cured" of his addiction to poetry and turned into a good citizen, in a way that feebly echoes Burgess' earlier powerful treatment of psychiatric conditioning in *A Clockwork Orange,* takes a job as a barman in a very posh London hotel. There is a reception in the hotel for a young celebrity called Yod Crewsy, who leads a pop-group, the Crewsy Fixers (= crucifiers), and who has published a widely acclaimed book of poems. The Prime Minister is one of the guests, making sycophantic remarks about the group: in this scene Burgess works off a load of venom against two of his favourite targets: Harold Wilson, and pop music. As a columnist Burgess has shown unyielding contempt for those intellectuals who take pop seriously, and has fired many fierce volleys at the contemporary cult of youth. In *Enderby* he brings in a lethal piece of satire of pretentious pop journalism:

> Jack Cade and the Revolters established the fruitful device of a heavy ictus on the fourth beat in their disc *Like He Done That Time,* pressed in April, 1964. In May of the same year this was further developed by Nap and the Bonies, who, in their *Knee Trembler,* transferred it to the quaver between the third beat and the fourth. Needless to say, this was achieved instinctually, these youthful performers being unburdened by traditional technical knowledge. In June both groups were superseded by the Tumers who, intuitively aware of a new shift in the *Zeitgeist,* perhaps wisely reverted to a greater simplicity of rhythmical texture and . . .

The plot jolts violently forward when Yod Crewsy is shot and wounded at the reception, in front of all the distinguished guests. Someone hands a gun to Enderby-Hogg, and he instantly flees, terrified of being condemned as a murderer, and yet in a way satisfied that someone has dared to assault such a fashionable idol (who has also, as he subsequently learns, plagiarised some of Enderby's own poems). Burgess, in his hurry to get on with the story, has done far less with this significant incident than might have been possible if he had preserved the imaginative intensity of the first part of *Enderby.* As it is, the episode is briskly got out of the way, and Enderby-Hogg becomes a man on the run, like the hero of a previous minor novel by Burgess, *The Doctor is Sick.* Enderby-Hogg flees to Spain and then Morocco in a series of rapid episodes that have the pace but not the originality of vintage Evelyn Waugh. At the end, Enderby is himself again, writing poetry in permanent exile in Morocco.

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The plunge into the episodic is not new in Burgess' fiction; indeed, his best novels, which I take to be *A Right to an Answer, A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed,* contain a high degree of episodic writing, suggesting that Burgess is better at inventive improvisation than at large scale organization. Nevertheless, those books were given a palpable unity by the intensity of their thematic preoccupations, and it is the lack of anything of this kind that makes *Enderby* largely a record of missed opportunities. In *The Novel Now* and elsewhere, Burgess has lamented the economic pressures that force the contemporary novelist into rapid production, however admirable fertility may be in itself; the effect of these pressures has been unhappily evident in Burgess' recent fiction, notably the second part of *Enderby* and the over-praised *Tremor of Intent,* which tries to be both a serious novel and a spy-story, and is little more than a series of bravura episodes. Recently, however, Burgess has announced that because of the intolerable demands of the British income tax authorities, he is giving up his residence in the United Kingdom and moving to Malta. Burgess' first novels were the product of his accumulated experience of an earlier exile, when he worked for some years as an education officer in Malaya; they also reflected the harsh impression that modern English life made on the returning exile. In going to exile again, Burgess is following in the footsteps of his master, Joyce, and of many other eminent modern writers, not least F. X. Enderby. If Burgess can get as a clear a vision of England from Malta as Joyce did of Ireland from Trieste and Zurich, then his fiction may move into a new and impressive phase. The fact that he has not, for several years, made full use of his novelistic gifts does not lessen my confidence that he can still surprise us with them.

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EDWARD W. SAID

Amateur of the Insoluble

WRITING WAS THE FIRST HUMAN activity to acquire a more or less permanent chronicle of its history. During the past century and a half, when all other human functions—psychological, biological, political, social, economic, cultural—were submitted to the austere revisions that transformed them into their own antitypes, writing alone escaped. For if it was not the instrument of critique, it was at least its absolute bearer. With everything else around it rethought and rewritten, writing now seems to be undergoing its own revolution from within, largely because it has the leisure, as well as the loneliness, to be freed of other business. The newest knowledges have not fully availed themselves of linear script: this is especially true in physics, mathematics and biology, even in linguistics. Modern literature has converted a dependence on writing into a method for isolating writing from what is natural, forcing it consequently to be haunted by problems that challenge its legitimacy, its intelligibility, and especially its continuity. Literally understood, the radical movement in literature and philosophy makes of writing an acquired mannerism whose performance, whose characteristic gesture, is based on the desire to leave the page for the healthier spaces of "life," the desire not to be written. The difficulty of poets like Mallarmé and Eliot, for instance, is that their writing does not want to be a text. Our fury as readers is that we watch words that wish not to be on a page, or words that want to be read before their appearance on the page, or words that *happen* to be on a page. Self-repugnance, originality, and chance—these are the signs by which writing reveals how it has turned on itself.

Writing therefore is a visible, but dissatisfied, barrier between language as a totality, and speech: this is perhaps a minimum description. The genres, like poetry, drama, fiction, are prior dreams, but only the essay (strictly speaking, an attempt) can be realized with the slenderest and the most native projection: the essential grammatological hope of inscribing words on a page. The poet *wants* a poem; the essayist merely sets out to write an essay, and if he manages the least discourse he need not necessarily have succeeded, but he will have tried: hence his essay, whereas the poet cannot safely say whether he made the poem he wanted. In the obscure, proleptic book that inaugurates Lukacs' career, he reflects that in the essay its form becomes its fate, yet since the essay's form is basically an idea of hesitating trial and of provocation, rather than of completed achievement, there is no fate in the essay. Plato, according to Lukacs, is the primal essayist, and the form of his work is Socrates' life, which is not a tragic one crowned

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with a true end, but an ironic life terminated by arbitrary intrusion. The center of the Platonic essay is the Idea: anterior to any of its manifestations, abstract, colorless, without extension, ungraspable. For the modern essayist, however, I think there is only the idea of writing itself, at best a biography of fading traces of thought, at worst a problematic stimulant to thought.

Along with only one other of the forms of writing the essay can afford to make no concessions to narrative description—it has no image in mind but itself—and to forsake what Hopkins called pitch, or utterly faithful accuracy, in the interests of play. Montaigne comes to mind immediately, also Oscar Wilde. In the modern perspective their essays are expatriations from things (as Wilde has one of his characters say, "things exist only to be argued about") and explorations in a language whose written version surprises by its wit, invention, sheer novelty. Writing, in other words, that delights in the mere fact of its being written cleverly, as if by a child first learning to scratch words on a page, seeing them as pretty and strangely meaningful bursts of script that transgress the unrelieved blankness of the paper. The epigram and the aphorism in the essay are what characters are to a play, or what philology is to literature. The subject of the essay does not exist beforehand, and neither does the subject go on existing after it—the subject is neither predictive nor prolonged beyond the essay, yet the subject is a choice made, as E. M. Cioran puts it, for "a break with the quietude of Unity." Thus some of his own essays, collected and translated under a title *(The Temptation to Exist)*[1] that preserves the essay's primitive hesitancy, "advance, dissociated from [their own] footsteps," and what they undertake is to give "knowledge without information." Cioran's project in writing coexists admirably with what he calls "the essential tendency of the modern mind": "to pulverize the *acquired*."

Such a project does not of course enhance the coherence of Cioran's work. Nevertheless he is an exquisitely intelligible writer who "prowls around the Absolute," preferring what he calls the fragility of subtlety to wholehearted sincerity that might obscure the very finest points. He cannot really be read consecutively, since his prose (to which Yeats's image of a fly struggling in marmalade is very suited) accomplishes turn after turn of dense thought that seems always to leave the reader elsewhere. Yet the vigilance of his writing is an expression of his, and his writing's, consciousness, and that is explicitly based on self-hatred. For what is the pulverization of the acquired but a desire to destroy the closest and the most intimate of our gained possessions, the self? "It is from self-hatred that consciousness emerges, hence it is in self-hatred that we must seek the point of departure of the human phenomenon. I hate myself: I am absolutely a man." When he charges us "to become a source, an origin, a starting point . . . to multiply by all

[1] THE TEMPTATION TO EXIST, by *E. M. Cioran*. Translated by *Richard Howard*, with an Introduction by *Susan Sontag*. Quadrangle. $5.00.

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means our *cosmogonic moments*" he urges us to convert our misanthropy into energy, and into spectacle. A desire consequently to be interesting is saturated with hatred, although interest is productive. Cioran's characteristic idiom then forges together consciousness (which includes being interesting, and hating it) with the production of thought and prose (which includes a wish to pulverize, and the means to work that end). As a form of provocation his writing deposits the reader into a maelstrom of discomforts. Here is an image from an essay ("The Evil Demiurge"), which appeared in the Summer, 1967, issue of this Review, that analogically turns back on the prose that delivers it: "We find it inadmissable that a god, *or for that matter a man,* could issue from a round of gymnastics consummated by a groan."

Cioran is peculiar enough to be a case, but not an example. His pages are dotted with impossible words like abulia, presbyopic, succedanea, aporia, mirific, obnubilation, incivism. Development, for example, is foreign to him, just as he is studiously foreign, actually and metaphysically, in everything he does. He is a Rumanian who writes French which, in Richard Howard's translation, comes over in English with very much the same jerky intellectual queerness. The essays that have been published over the past five years in THE HUDSON REVIEW (translated by Marthiel Mathews and Frederick Brown) emerged from other collections, but bearing the same marks of what Cioran calls the hybrid intellectual: a talent for "voyeurism of the void," the incapacity to emulate Eastern or mystical abstraction, the distraction that keeps his rages from final nihilism. He has written on Joseph de Maistre, Machiavelli, utopias, but above all on decomposition. Most of all, he thinks, he suffers from the inability "to take place." Like Rameau's nephew he sees the world, and his writing therefore acts out, a series of positions taken—but only for a short while. Then he abandons them all since "meaning," he avers, "is beginning to date." Inescapably the predicament returns him to an awareness of the impasse of writing itself:

> If today's artist takes refuge in obscurity, it is because he can no longer create with *what he knows.* The extent of his information has turned him into a commentator, an Aristarchus without illusions. To safeguard his originality he has no recourse save an excursion into the unintelligible. He will therefore abandon the facts inflicted on him by an erudite and barren age. If he is a poet, he discovers that none of his words, in its legitimate acceptation, has a future; if he wants them to be viable, he must fracture their meaning, court impropriety. In the world of Letters as a whole, we are witnessing the capitulation of the Word which, curiously enough, is even more exhausted than we are. Let us follow the descending curve of its vitality, surrender to its degree of overwork and decrepitude, espouse the process of its agony. Paradoxically, it was never so free before;

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> its submission is its triumph: emancipated from reality, from experience, it indulges in the final luxury of no longer expressing anything except the ambiguity of its own action.

Such a view of language makes it rather difficult to summarize systematically Cioran's own thought, although he is plainly a man of very strong dislikes, which include himself, other writers, and the novel preeminently. His attacks on Christianity, and on St. Paul in particular, are unlike Nietzsche's in that, first of all, they see the religion only as a bundle of depressing contradictions and, second of all, they cannot forgive Christianity for being *passé*. For Cioran, however, the premise of his withering criticism is not as it was for Marx in the criticism of religion, but rather in the attack upon time and history. Here Cioran rejoins the radical critique of writing of which I spoke earlier. For writing is a moving image of time: every word and letter is an addition to previous writing just as—to force the parallel a little closer—every moment adds to the prior sum. Whether as writer or as man, the urge to *add to*, which Cioran identifies as the demiurge in man, is a disease, the result "of centuries of attention to time":

> Instead of letting it erode us gradually, we decided to go time one better, to add to its moments *our own*. This new time grafted onto the old one, this time elaborated and projected, soon revealed its virulence: objectivized, it became history, a monster we have called up against ourselves, a fatality we cannot escape, even by recourse to the formulas of passivity, the recipes of wisdom.

In whatever we do, or write, we are acting against ourselves by remembering, rewriting (though digressively) the tired script of history. Thus "when a writer's gifts are exhausted, it is the ineptitude of a spiritual director that comes to fill the blanks of his inspiration." Such a man then is "a spoiler suspended between speech and silence." Most writing is fraudulent, a mask for the void behind it, and the novelist, because his fictions are the most exorbitant, is "an archeologist of absence."

The greatest justice that can be done Cioran is to apply these strictures to his own writings, to let his thought think against itself. His relish for extreme statement, as I suggested earlier, is always indulged; one statement first animates, then precipitates steps towards a new statement, equally extreme—this is what Cioran himself calls "the idolatry of becoming." The essays are a biography of movements, in the way that an oscillograph conveys a version of music that is not the music itself. To be "up against itself at last," as he claims his work to be, means that Cioran's essays instead toss about at a remove from everything they attempt to touch. He puts it very well:

> We breathe too fast to be able to grasp things in themselves or to expose their fragility. Our painting postulates and distorts them,

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> creates and disfigures them, and binds us to them. I bestir myself, therefore I emit a world as suspect as my speculation which justifies it; I espouse movement, which changes me into a generator of being, into an artisan of fictions, while my cosmogonic verve makes me forget that, led on by the whirlwind of acts, I *am* nothing but an acolyte of time, an agent of decrepit universes.

A victim of its own temporal fixation, Cioran's writing is reduced to a particularly energetic variety of what Roland Barthes has called writing at the zero degree.

I find it difficult therefore to agree with Susan Sontag (who has provided a set of valiant, but not always pertinent, notes as an introduction) when she claims Cioran for the tradition of Novalis, Rilke and Kafka. On the contrary, he seems a mocking ghost of all traditions, which in effect means that he mocks all writing in some of the same ways that Jacques Derrida, for example, has closed the world of writing by treating it as *mere* writing. Even less—and here Miss Sontag curiously implies this while stating the opposite—does Cioran resemble John Cage, for whom a kind of joyous freedom, *jouissance,* underlies every one of his efforts in either prose, music, or silence. Cioran, by his own admission, is "a fanatic *without convictions,*" firmly, even hysterically, committed to the amateurism of the insoluble. His prose is perfect for what it does, and it is airless as well; like the Europe he characterizes mercilessly, the prose becomes more interesting as it masters the art of surviving itself. His highest praise is bestowed on the Jews, for they, he thinks, have always represented what in a sense his writing wishes to accomplish, "failure on the move."

Cioran is to the essay what Borges, I think, is to fiction. That is, when we read both writers we are constantly in the presence of the mask and of the apocryphal utterance, one undercutting the other, and so on until we are tired out by the unceasing game. Borges' fable and what Cioran calls "abstract autobiography" are pretexts by which, as Cioran goes on to say, the writer "can continue to cry out: 'Anything, except my truths!' " We might call this the insomniac stage of writing, and were it not for the preservation of ironic hauteur, the stage seems a needless punishment. Yet the sustained pose of such a style—detached from and yet thoroughly implicated in its revulsions —gives one pause. For after all writing has triumphed, with

> the universe reduced to the articulations of the sentence, *prose as the unique reality,* the word self-absorbed, emancipated from the object and from the world: a sonority-in-itself, cut off from the exterior, the tragic ipseity of a language bound to its own finitude.

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ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS

Literature's Gratifying Dead End

IN THE CHORUSES THAT PREFACE each act of *Henry V,* Shakespeare demands of his audience positive efforts at constitutive imagination that go far beyond Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief. The spectators are "you," commanded in a series of imperatives to "force a play," "suppose," "think," "entertain conjecture," "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts," "play with your fancies," "make imaginary puissance." With primal omnipotence of thought they heave kings across the water, "jumping o'er times" as well.

Occasionally the choral imperatives are urgently doubled: "work, work your thoughts," "follow, follow, grapple your minds." Vision depends not so much on what happens on the stage as "in the quick forge and working place of thought." Seeing requires imagination; "eyes advance after your thoughts." Even though it is a history play, many of the choral passages give the impression that Shakespeare agrees with Robbe-Grillet's statement about the film *Last Year at Marienbad:* "the only important character is the spectator, *in his mind* unfolds the whole story, which is precisely *imagined* by him."

When we are by ourselves reading fiction or poetry, there is not even the "wooden O," the cockpit of the theatre surrounding us, or four or five ragged foils in "brawl ridiculous" to mimic Agincourt. The reader sits passively, staring at small bird tracks on a page, twiddling a lock of hair. Everything that happens, happens inside him, but what exactly does happen? Shakespeare speaks constantly of "thoughts," but these are not thoughts in the ordinary sense, cognitive and analytical. Such thoughts come after the imaginative experience or interrupt it; they belong to literary criticism. That, as Northrop Frye insists, is a very different kind of thing from the experience of literature itself. The former can be taught; the latter cannot.

Norman Holland's previous book, *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare,* a sensible survey, was not nearly so bold in theory as *The Dynamics of Literary Response.* Now, guided to some extent by Northrop Frye, he attacks intelligently, comprehensively, consistently and valuably almost all the traditional critical problems in the light of his own largely psychoanalytic sense of what literature actually does. The underlying thesis of his new work[1] can be described in some such terms as these:

When a man is "absorbed" or "immersed" in a story—and we cannot have aesthetic experience if this does not occur—he is not pri-

[1] THE DYNAMICS OF LITERARY RESPONSE, by *Norman N. Holland.* Oxford University Press. $8.00.

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marily thinking *about* what he reads. That implies separation, externality. The work, rather, is thinking *him*. His ego has become object, not subject. We speak of being "absorbed" and "immersed" in the work, but actually it is the other way around: we take the work into ourselves, introject it. What the ego is immersed in—sometimes with oceanic raptness—is its own larger, profounder self, which the work, as a series of excitations and counterexcitations, has set in motion and directed.

The larger self controls the assenting ego, but is in turn controlled, when the work is successful, by the formal and stylistic elements of the work as art. Mr. Holland, though a psychoanalytic critic, does not disregard or minimize these formal elements. On the contrary, he gives them primacy. Life is constantly stirring us up, but art through form can do this in a way which offers double satisfaction. We are pleased by what stirs us, but also pleased by what keeps that stirring within suitable bounds.

Cognition, understanding, is not the end of art. Neither is vision—seeing—though we are told by the chorus in Henry V: "Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them printing their proud hoofs 'i th' receiving earth." Conrad, in his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus,* said "my task . . . is, before all, to make you see." But much literature, including some of the greatest lyric poetry, can be read without conscious sensory imagery; in fact some of the best metaphors are ruined by trying to visualize them. Can we *see* the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd. . . . He has set a table before me in the presence of mine enemies"? It is the same with emotion—or "affect," as Mr. Holland calls it—despite the popularity of emotive theories of art. When art "works," when it absorbs us, we may feel some general heightening of being, but in most of our reading, even—or especially—of major works, we are less conscious of specific emotion than during quite trivial events of everyday life.

What does go on, then, beneath the surface, to give the experience of imaginative literature its peculiar character and satisfactions, and to justify the attention it receives educationally? When we read, we are on a treasure-hunting expedition that sends down divers from the surface ship. They come up, most of them, thoroughly pleased with their adventure, but they bring nothing tangible with them, and have no language in which to report what they have seen. Critical rationalizations of the value of literature abound, but they are unprovable, and in their contradictions cancel each other out.

Carrying on beyond Simon Lesser's *Fiction and the Unconscious,* and Wayne Shumaker's *Fiction and the Irrational,* Mr. Holland has worked out a tabular model of the literary process. Above the line of the text itself the conscious responses to thematic suggestions produce a central meaning. Below the line highly charged personal associations give life to a central fantasy. This fantasy is created in

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large part unconsciously by the reader from indications in the text; at the same time he more or less consciously creates the central thematic meaning from these same indications. As in dreams, he has to supply the materials of the experience wholly from within; they are obviously not in or on the printed page. There is the important difference, though, that he is responding to an articulated series of cues coming from outside, from other minds, which in turn have been influenced by definable literary traditions.

Certainly art has a different social character from dreams, but Mr. Holland finds the similarities more significant than the differences. Most critics agree that the end of art, is not those conscious ideas which it may share with sociology, morality, religion or politics. Its power and essential satisfaction come from the deep-lying fantasies which it shares with dreams. These fantasies develop, according to Mr. Holland, from interactions among the seven stages of our development, all still alive in us: oral, anal, urethral, phallic, oedipal, latent, genital. They are specifically shaped or transformed by fourteen kinds of defense against unconscious impulses: repression, denial, reversal, reaction-formation, undoing, projection, introjection, identification with the aggressor, turning against the self, regression, splitting, symbolization, sublimation, rationalization. These can all be defined as forms of displacement. In literature, an oral form, the principal displacement is to language itself, beginning with nursery rhymes, where the manifest pleasure comes from free play with words and sounds. For Mr. Holland, in fact, literature's great virtue is its ability to manage, by defensive forms that are in themselves pleasurable, the primal fantasies to which it gives release.

Norman Holland constructs his rather elaborate models to show exactly how psychic requiredness dictates literary form. In his emphasis on strategy and symbolic action, he is close to Kenneth Burke; in his psychoanalytic sense of language itself—its sounds, etymologies and plays on words—he is close both to Burke and their common master, Freud. His idea of the "balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities" in successful art is that of Coleridge and I. A. Richards, recast in Freudian terms. On the kind and explicitness of the fantasies gratified and on the depth of the anxieties that they entail depend the kind and depth of formal defenses. The latter, which include rational ideas and a mimesis of the external, empirical world, can be described objectively, but they cannot be compared and evaluated without taking into account the buried fantasies which are their reason for being. "Efforts to judge a phrase or an episode without recognizing it as part of a dynamic, balanced process of transformation must end in gibberish." This is why criticism, with its welter of conflicting theories, is hardly possible as a serious academic discipline.

Most of Holland's assumptions about the nature of the unconscious

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fantasies are taken uncritically from Freud, but he is far superior to most Freudians in his respect for the distinctive verbal structure constituting a literary work. When art is fully achieved, both the fantasies and their balancing defenses are consistently represented in every detail of action and character, of idea and image, of language and sound. He demonstrates this ingeniously by looking again at some well-known materials: *The Wife of Bath's Tale,* the character of Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet,* Macbeth's "tomorrow and tomorrow" speech, Lovelace's "The Scrutinie," Arnold's "Dover Beach," Conrad's *The Secret Agent,* Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner," and many others. In nearly every case he adds something new that other commentators had not thought of, but which is consistent both with the text and the nature of our infantile experience. He tries his method also on the theatre of Brecht and Ionesco, and the cinema of Bergman, Fellini and Antonioni, because they seem to break so many of the rules traditionally assumed to be necessary for artistic satisfaction.

The underlying fantasy that Holland seems most often to discover is that of woman as devouring, castrating mother. It is too bad that, as a Freudian, he feels he has to reject Jung out of hand, for his favorite fantasy is one that Jung in *Symbols of Transformation* and Erich Neumann in *The Great Mother* and *The History and Nature of Consciousness* developed with a wonderful summoning of mythic and literary materials and with an emphasis on the idea of transformation which is close to his own. His book, rather cerebral and affectless, could have profited, too, by a little of the visionary eroticism to be found in *Love's Body* by Norman Brown. Holland admires Northrop Frye, but rejects the quasi-religious autonomy which Frye and Cassirer grant to myth. In Holland's view the acceptance of myth is a rationalization which gratifies "an unconscious wish to return to ancient, timeless, and universal at-oneness with the world," which is really at-oneness with the nurturing mother.

The Dynamics of Literary Response seems unhistorical, a model that could be applied to any literature at any time, once defense requirements have been adjusted to cultural circumstances. But actually it fits in with a rapidly developing current literary nihilism that Ihab Hassan and a number of French writers have already defined from a quite different point of view. For Holland, the purpose and end of literature is simply fantasied gratification. We talk boldly about "meaning" but this is mere rationalization, disguise, displacement. "Almost any kind of interpretation we derive from a text will get it past the censor and permit our egos to enjoy the fantasy content." A particularly ironical example is Leslie Fiedler's study of an "exploitation" film, *The Immoral Mr. Teas.* "Mr. Fiedler's astute analysis has erected such an intellectual 'meaning' for this film (though it is scarcely above the level of a stag movie) that any self-

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respecting intellectual could go see it with a clear conscience and a blithe spirit—of analysis."

If we accept Mr. Holland's explanations we must believe that all the grandiose claims made for great literature—its truth, its wisdom, its morality, its increase of the sensitivity, goodness and humanity of its readers—are unprovable and probably false. He does say that it offers opportunities for identity-testing and for exploring the boundaries between self and not-self, between consciousness and unconsciousness, but he is not clear that this has any great value. The satisfactions of literature are purely hedonistic, and all the complex and contradictory critical apologies for it in the academies and the reviews are merely ways of protecting and legitimizing these gratifications. The vast refined structures created by literature and its students are fascinating in themselves, of course, but there is no evidence that gratification in the indulgence that they afford has any transferable values, that it makes its creators or absorbers one whit happier or better men, or their culture basically more satisfactory. It may well be that in the near future much of the energy and intelligence that has been diverted into repeating the same basic fantasies over and over again will be expended in other ways which may be more permanently satisfying, both psychically and socially.

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Notes on Contributors

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RICHARD WILBUR's two poems will be included in his next volume of poetry, *Walking to Sleep.*

CHARLES TOMLINSON's "Swimming Chenango Lake" was read last Fall as Phi Beta Kappa poem at Colgate University.

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RONALD PERRY is currently working on a new translation of the *Ramayana.*

BENOY MOJUMDAR,* now tragically confined in a Calcutta asylum, is considered to be one of the most brilliant Bengali poets of modern times. His translator, JYOTIRMOY DATTA,* is a Bengali poet and critic who recently returned to India after a year as visiting lecturer at the University of Chicago.

JOHN PECK* is twenty-seven and grew up in western Pennsylvania small towns. He has just joined the faculty at Princeton as an instructor in English. The poems in this issue are his first published work.

VICTOR BROMBERT, chairman of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Yale, is a specialist in 19th and 20th century French literature. His latest book is *Stendhal: Fiction and the Theme of Freedom.*

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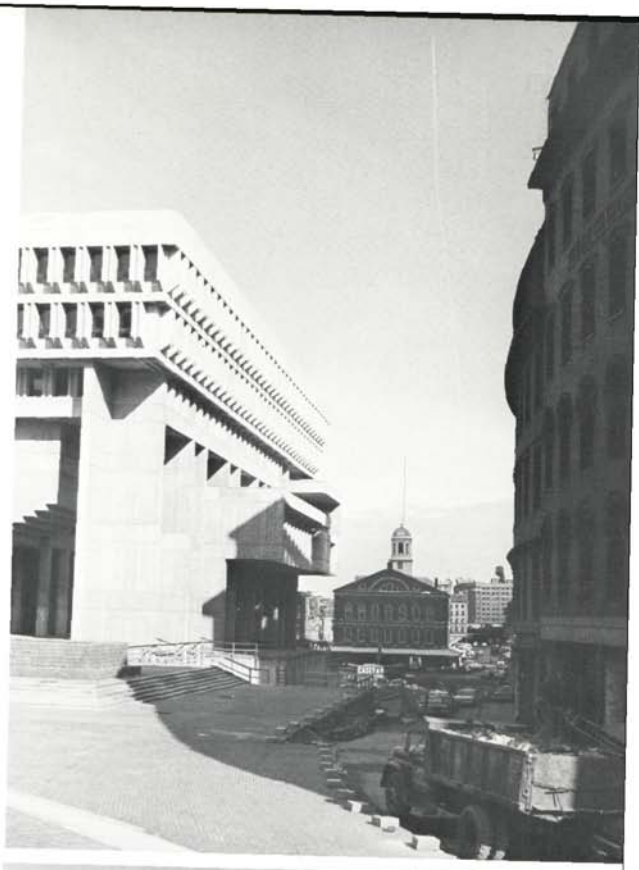

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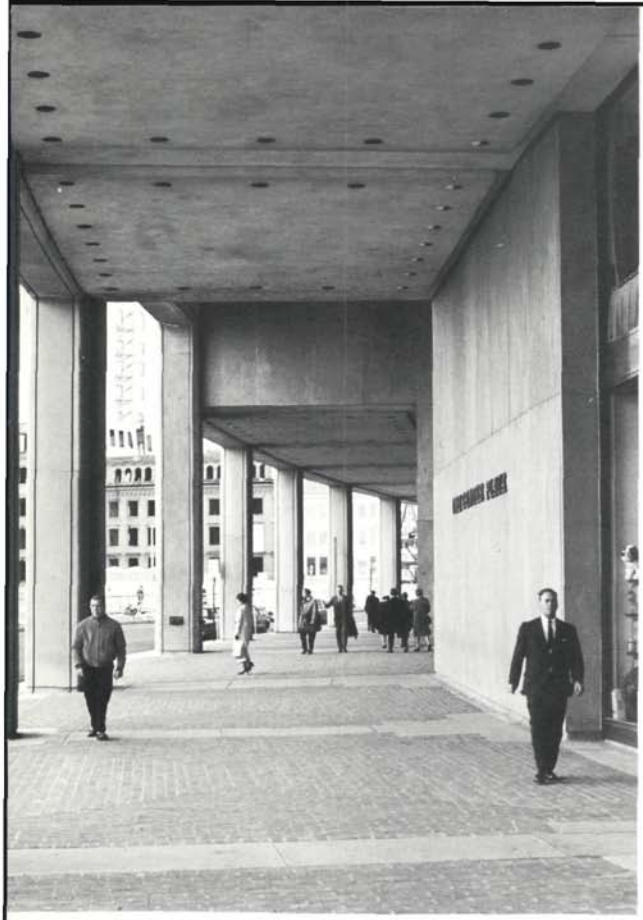

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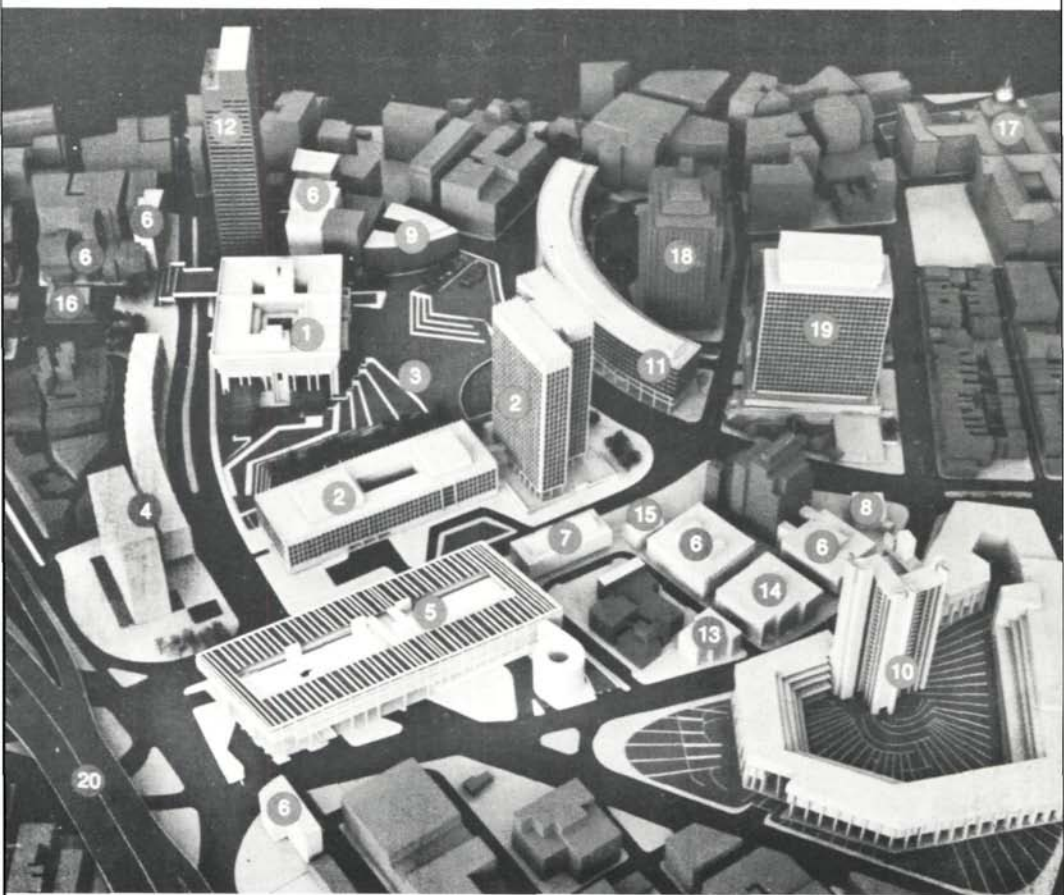

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